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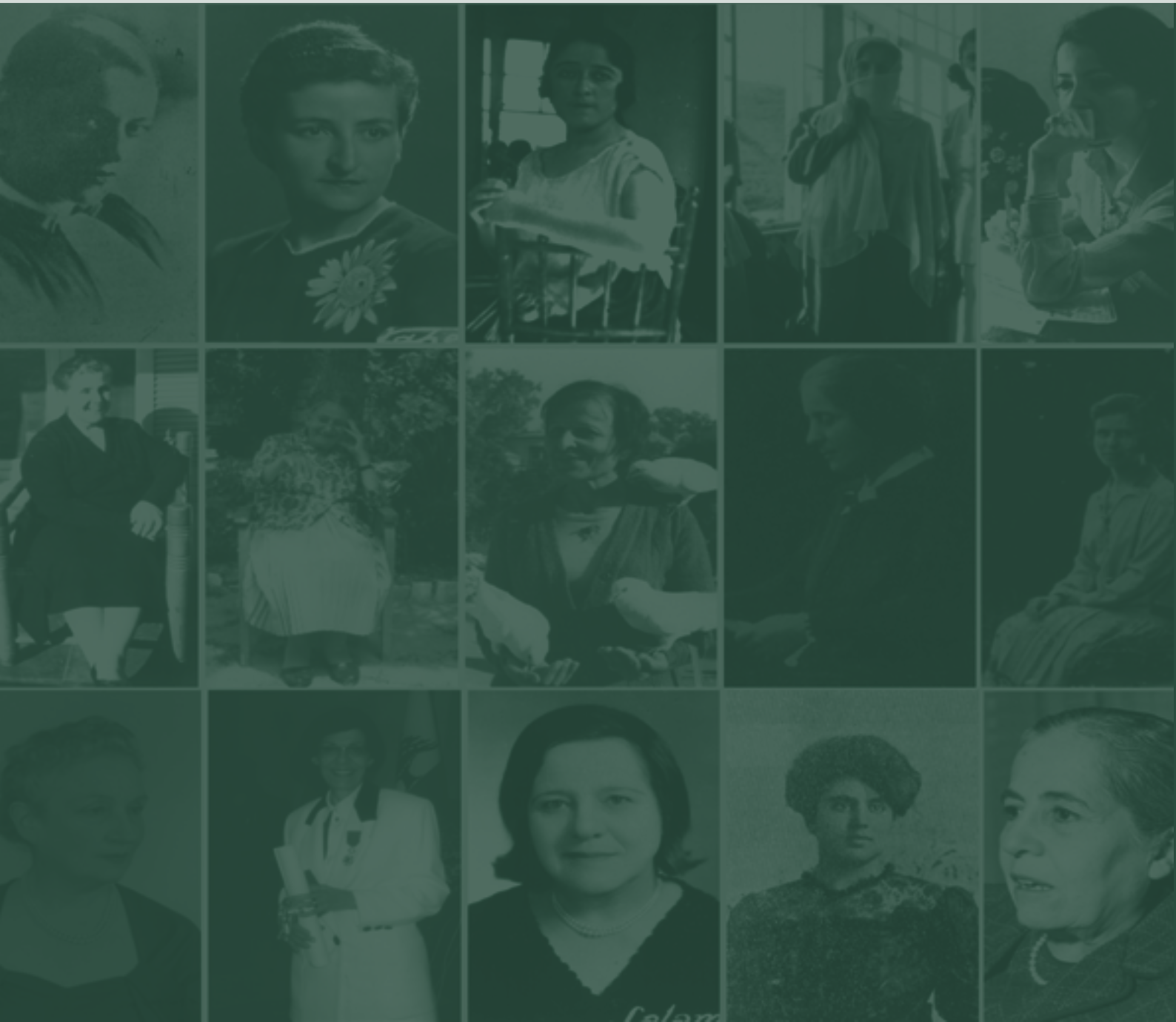

A TRIBUTE TO

MONA CHEMALI KHALAF

Former Director of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW), presently The Arab Institute for Women (AiW) at the Lebanese American University (LAU) (1997-2005).

Disclaimer

This e-book was developed to fulfill the vision of the late former Director, Mona Chemali Khalaf, of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW), presently The Arab Institute for Women (AiW) at the Lebanese American University (LAU), whose work on this project began in the early 2000s. The AiW, and the project's funders – the Government of Canada, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and UN Women – do not endorse the methodology, information, or conclusions presented in this publication. The involvement of The AiW was limited solely to the editorial and production support necessary to bring this e-book to completion.

A WORD FROM DR. SAMIRA AGHACY

Former Director of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW), presently The Arab Institute for Women (AiW) at the Lebanese American University (LAU) (2013-2015).

I have known Mrs. Mona Khalaf for many years, both as a professor of Economics at LAU and as Director of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) (1997–2005). I was editor of *Al-Raida* when Mona took over, and we worked closely together. What a rewarding experience it was! She was gracious, tolerant, friendly, and compassionate, as well as cultured and creative – qualities that contributed to her distinctive mark on the Institute. In addition to her caring attributes, she was also sharp, insightful, and critical, and always on the cutting edge. She believed in the importance of education and consciousness-raising and strove to empower women economically, legally, and politically. She strongly believed that change does not happen overnight, but, with perseverance, it is bound to happen. As we cannot rock the boat, she used to say, we will steer it in the right direction and that is what she set out to do.

At LAU, she was a role model and an inspiration, a great teacher, an adamant supporter of faculty rights (having served as faculty representative), with a charming personality. One faculty member, Nabila Haraty, describes her as compassionate, strong, upright, outspoken, and honest: LAU's best mirror to the outside world.

In addition to the serious and rigorous work that she did, Mona had a great sense of humor. Dr. Said Ladki, the Dean of the Business School (where she taught for over 15 years), told me that he came across Mona on Makhoul Street one day. He called out to her, but when she did not respond, he went up to her and said:

انتو يا بنات ما بتحكوا مع الناس؟

It looks as though you, LAU girls, do not answer when people call you? She responded:

نحنا بنات عِيِّل مربايين ما منرد على حدا.

We are well-mannered girls; we do not talk to anybody in the street.

In the midst of all her work as a busy career woman, Mona had all the time in the world for her family. She adored them. She always shared many fond memories. Her pragmatic, down-to-earth sensibility, molded by her rich background in economics and reinforced by her love and appreciation of the arts and literature, made her an exceptional individual and enabled her to contribute to the Institute in a unique way. The numerous art and photography exhibits that she organized, such as the photo exhibits on "Violence Against Women," "Women and War," and "Veils," testify to her deep appreciation of the arts. The film festivals she initiated – such as "Women's Diaries" and "Women and Sexuality" – were a tribute to Arab women and Arab women directors.

Mona was an amazing communicator. I learned from her that, to succeed, one must remain deeply connected to people. Mona cherished all her friends and remained loyal to them to the end: her old dressmaker, her hairdresser, the flower man, and her colleagues and friends. Her friends and admirers were many, ranging from the higher echelons of society to the lowest. The flower seller on Maqdisi Street (Taqqush) was a lifelong friend who always called her Umm Amin. With his help, she filled her balcony with gorgeous flowers and plants that never escaped the sight of anyone who passed by the building where she lived. In addition to Taqqush, there was Mary Bou Kalam. Mona decided to honor one of the oldest members of the cleaning staff who had served LAU for fifty years. Accordingly, on October 5, 2000, the Institute celebrated Mary's 50 years of service to LAU. It was an unforgettable occasion attended by faculty and staff.

Mona believed in the need to change the situation of women in the Arab world. She positioned herself as an advocate of women's and human rights, women's equal access to economic resources, and women's empowerment. She was a member of the Lebanese Commission for the Preparation of the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women, the Lebanese National Commission for Women's Affairs, and served on the Board of Trustees of the UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), 1996–1999.

Mona was committed to women's rights as human rights and believed that the Institute should remain an ally and peer to all women who needed justice, protection, and support. She was particularly devoted to women in the labor force. Her interest in women laborers made her anxious about the vast amount of work done by women that remained virtually underestimated. In her "Introduction" to *Al-Raida's* file on "Women in the Labor Force," she wrote that these women had been taken for granted and that their work outside the household was often seen as merely an extension of their reproductive and domestic roles – work that meant uncompensated labor, done for free, and therefore unrecognized.

Mona has made a great contribution to women's rights and has done it with integrity, love, and an amazing sense of dedication.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dr. Sleiman El Hajj

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August 2025

The profiles of notable, mainly mid-19th to mid-20th century, Lebanese and/or Arab women achievers compiled in this volume are impressive in the breadth and nature of their accomplishments. Whether social, literary, educational, political, medical, philanthropic, or even (sometimes, seemingly) tribal, these achievements must be read in their respective historical context, where women's presence in public life often took a backseat and where their voices in the private domestic sphere were likewise inaudible. A woman deciding to remove her veil/hijab or to forge a career as either a model, a physician, or a politician may not seem remarkable in 2025, but it would have been a novelty generative of a communal stir if not social opprobrium in 1880s Beirut. Hence, in light of the legacies of Ottoman, later French Mandate, patriarchy that women still negotiate to date, reading the gathered profiles from a present-day feminist framework may otherwise cast a pall on, if not downright dampen, the thrust and impact of the communal changes and improvements that these women effected, and the mammoth female-led efforts behind them. The Arab Institute of Women, while not endorsing any potentially partisan or political position in the profiles that follow, invites the reader into the fascinating worlds, and worldviews, of the women who grappled with hardship, adversity, and misogyny, to make a difference for themselves and for other women – at the levels of family, society, and country.

PROLOGUE

Coming to Life

This e-book is the outcome of a labor of love and dedication to leaders and pioneers in our community. It was conceived in the early 2000s by an exceptional lady, Ms. Mona Chemali Khalaf, who passed away in 2018 without completing the project. The e-book is the outcome of many years of hard work and numerous hurdles. What matters, though, is that it is out and accessible to all those who want to learn about the impressive achievements of pioneering Lebanese women. They are indeed exceptional women who, despite many challenges, dared to take uncharted roads, unafraid of the reactions of the traditional society in which they were born and raised.

Over more than two decades, this e-book has undergone several stages of development, which have been shaped by the dedication and contributions of many. From its initial conception as an idea to its final form today as an e-book, numerous individuals, particularly members of our academic community, have worked tirelessly on researching, editing, and refining its content, each adding their own effort, perspective, and care to ensure that the vision of the late Ms. Khalaf is faithfully brought to life. The stories of these women were reconstructed through heartfelt conversations with their families and through meticulous research in old magazines, books, and other historical archives. What you are reading now is the culmination of years of challenges, overcome through perseverance, collaboration, and a shared commitment to honoring the pioneering women whose stories continue to inspire.

We are hopeful that this e-book turns out to be as Ms. Khalaf had imagined it to be. After decades of interruptions and revisions, the final e-book now includes the profiles of 35 women whose stories are fully documented and most accurately retold. To the late Ms. Khalaf, each of these women was a deep source of pride for her, as she had the privilege of personally knowing many of them, or at the very least, their children, whose stories lovingly carried forward the legacy she held so dear.

Rationale

This e-book serves as a testament to women's impact on Lebanese society and beyond. Each story reflects the spirit of resilience and unwavering pursuit for distinction, serving as a reminder of the strength, determination, and vision of women who broke barriers at a time of exceptional challenges. Every woman's journey speaks volumes, starting with those who emigrated during a bygone era – peddling goods across unfamiliar lands, enduring hardships, and yet finding ways to support their families and communities – to the educators, doctors, artists, and activists who have emerged as a guiding light. These women have been able to redefine what it means to lead and serve. Indeed, this e-book invites readers to pause, take a breath, and reflect. It is a reminder of how far we can go when our courage meets opportunity, when our persistence transforms barriers into breakthroughs, and when our silence turns into voice.

A Tribute to Those Behind This E-Book

This e-book is a tribute to the writers and editors who dedicated much time and effort to this work, particularly Mona Chemali Khalaf, Josianne Maalouf, Dania Sinno, Anita Nassar, Samira Aghacy, Mayssa Hajj, and Sleiman El Hajj. In the name of The Arab Institute for Women's (AiW) mission, we honor their vision, their tireless efforts, and the passion they poured into documenting the achievements and struggles of women across generations. This publication stands as a testament to their memory and as a fulfillment of the promise they began decades ago.

Sections

This e-book is organized around four different sections: Education, Politics, Writers, and Professionals. Each brings to light the noteworthy contributions of Lebanese women in the 19th and 20th centuries.

1- Education

The first section, *Education*, honors women who were among the first to advance learning, whether by founding schools, leading and managing educational institutions, or mentoring the new generations.

The history of education in Lebanon has been closely intertwined with religious institutions. Before the 19th century, each religious community managed its own schools, primarily educating boys, while girls' education

was largely limited to domestic skills such as sewing and embroidery. Christian communities ran early schools in monasteries and religious centers (Al-Khatib, 1984), while Muslim children were educated in mosques and kuttāb, where they learned reading, writing, religious texts, and basic literacy (Abou al-Shamat, 2009).

During the 19th century, education in Lebanon began to diversify. Ottoman state schools and European and American missionary institutions emerged, offering modern curricula for both boys and girls. Local Christian institutions also founded schools in the mid-to-late 19th century. In fact, the expansion of elementary education in Lebanon and Syria during this era was substantial. By 1894, the Jesuits operated 192 primary schools enrolling about 8,000 boys and 3,000 girls, while the American Protestant Mission ran 130 primary schools serving more than 7,000 pupils (Baytiyeh, 2017). These schools introduced science, philosophy, languages, and other subjects inspired by Western education, while also opening new opportunities for girls. Higher educational institutions were established by missionaries, including the Syrian Protestant College, now the American University of Beirut (AUB), founded in 1866; and the Saint Joseph University (USJ), founded in 1875 (Frayha, 2003).

Importantly, the mid-1800s saw the first women entering schools not only as students but also as teachers and administrators. For example, the American School for Girls (ASG), now the Lebanese American University (LAU), founded in 1835, was amongst the first to provide education for girls in the Ottoman Empire (Fleischman, 2009). Its establishment signaled a considerable shift in the educational landscape, as missionary and later local institutions expanded opportunities for girls' literacy and professional training. These early initiatives helped normalize women's presence in formal education and gradually fostered a generation of women equipped to participate in public, intellectual, and social spheres.

By the mid-20th century, Lebanon's educational landscape was characterized by a mix of public and private schools. School and university enrollment among women showed consistent growth during this period, reaching almost parity with men. Between 1973-1974, girls' enrollment in both public and private schools represented 45.2% of 801,508 students, whereas between 1993-1994, it rose to 49.9% out of 770,559 students. In universities, women's enrollment increased from 25.2% of 49,997 students in 1973-1974 to 48.2% of 74,810 students in 1993-1994 (Khalaf, 1995). This expansion not only reflected broader social and educational progress but also laid the foundation for women's growing participation in professional and public life.

Today, these earlier gains continue to shape gender dynamics, with women now often outnumbering men in several fields of higher education in Lebanon. The long-term effects of this progress are most visible in women's increasing presence in the workforce, civil society, and public leadership, despite the persistence of yet unaddressed social and cultural challenges.

2- Politics

The second section, *Politics*, examines the unmatched efforts of women who atypically influenced political life, from activism and advocacy to positions of public leadership.

Long before independence, Lebanese women from powerful families have helped in shaping the country's political life. In fact, women's most visible forms of political participation began during the First World War, when they founded associations to oppose Ottoman rule and organized public protests against conflicts, wars, and famine (Al-Khatib, 1984). For the first time in Lebanon's modern history, women from working-class backgrounds joined the political struggle, breaking class and gender barriers in pursuit of natural rights and political freedom.

By 1919, women were actively engaging in debates on Lebanon's independence and self-determination. Side by side with fellow citizens, they boldly voiced their political opinions to international commissions and challenged colonial narratives (Robinson, 2021). Their activism reached a new peak in 1943, during the French Mandate, when they led mass demonstrations demanding the release of detained national leaders, including the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, and others (Thompson, 2004). This served as a defining moment in women's history of activism that affirmed their political presence and cemented their role in shaping Lebanon's political life. Women saw the struggle for independence as an opportunity to move beyond education and charitable work and push for formal political participation, which had been traditionally dominated by men (Schubert, 2020).

Following independence, women's organizations united to form national committees that campaigned for legal and political rights. It was a period of struggle for women's political participation and equal rights in public life, as we know it today. For instance, their persistent advocacy led to the recognition of women's right to vote. In 1952, Lebanon granted voting rights to literate women, and by 1957, this right was extended to all women regardless of literacy (Harik, 1980). The extension of suffrage to women granted them significant political and social agency, allowing them to shape public life despite ongoing societal and structural challenges. Women's political activism in Lebanon persisted across the 20th century and maintained momentum up to the outbreak of the civil war in 1975, resuming in various forms until the present.

Women today continue to push for reforms, from legal equality to social justice, shaping the political discourse both publicly and behind the scenes. Their efforts cemented women's role as central and not secondary actors in Lebanon's modern political history.

3- Writers

The third section, *Writers*, celebrates the literary and journalistic contributions of women whose pens reshaped the intellectual and cultural narrative in Lebanon.

Beginning in the last two decades of the 19th century, Arab women's intellectual life witnessed the spread of women's literary salons in Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt (Morsy, 2007). Their writings, whether in fiction, poetry, or in journals and magazines, set the foundation for a vibrant intellectual awakening that activated women's voices in the literary field, and in public life.

By the end of the 19th century, women's writings prospered across Lebanon and Egypt, with the printed word becoming a powerful medium for their expression and engagement (Ashour et al., 2008). Between 1892 and 1939, 24 women's journals were published in Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt, reflecting a growing intellectual presence. While some women restricted their writings to the more traditional issues related to women – given the normative restrictions of the time – others were bold enough to question social conventions and challenge religious and cultural constraints imposed on women (Ghurayib, 1985). An interesting fact is that while women initially faced legal and cultural barriers that restricted them from publishing under their own names, many broke these limitations by writing anonymously or using pseudonyms (Ashour et al., 2009).

With time, particularly starting the end of the 19th century, Beirut emerged as a central hub for the explosion of journalistic activity, with women participating as both readers and writers (Holt, 2009). In particular, women writers slowly began turning their publications into forums for feminist thought and modernist ideas that inspired a new generation of Arab women writers to explore questions of identity, freedom, and individuality. A distinct and distinguished women's literary voice firmly emerged in Lebanon, with authors openly addressing issues of personal freedom and gender inequality. Today, Lebanese women continue to contribute significantly to the development of both Arabic literature and feminist thought in the entire region.

4- Professionals

Finally, the fourth section, *Professionals*, explores the stories of women who broke prevailing limits in professional and public life, defying the confines of convention and opening paths for others to follow.

Towards the end of the 19th century, Lebanese women began entering the paid workforce, when owners of silk factories, for instance, sought affordable labor (Khater, 1996). This period marked the first large-scale participation of women in economic life outside the household. Between the two World Wars, Lebanese women began making significant strides in the arts and cultural fields, and emerging as pioneers in music, dance, theatre, and the visual arts, and gaining public recognition for their talent and professionalism. Many other women went into the teaching profession until the eruption of the Second World War, while a smaller number entered professions like journalism, law, and medicine (Thompson, 2004). Meanwhile, between 1880 and 1914, Lebanese women, particularly Christians, increasingly migrated to countries such as Australia, Argentina, and Brazil, drawn by expanding economic opportunities and improved livelihoods (Khater, 2001).

By the mid-20th century, progress in women's professional involvements had accelerated. An increasing number of young women gained access to education and employment, collectively pushing for improved professional opportunities (Lattouf, 2004). Women began joining the ranks of engineers, scientists, and academics, taking on teaching and leadership roles in universities. Despite these achievements, progress remained uneven. For instance, between 1973 and 1974, the highest proportion of women students in higher education was in Pharmacy (61%) and in Arts and Literature (40%), while in fields such as Science, women constituted only 25%; in Law and Political Science, 19%; in Medicine, 12%; and in Engineering, 5%. The total number of women students in universities was 30% (Hammoud, 1978).

Since the last decades of the 20th century, Lebanese women have been working to establish themselves in various professional fields, despite persisting societal challenges (Al-Raida, 1998). These developments reflect broader processes of modernization and women's empowerment in Lebanon, laying the groundwork for the professional visibility and public recognition women hold today.

Final word

This e-book is an invitation to discover the worlds these women explored in their lives. It would not have been possible without the minds and hearts of those who believed these voices matter and deserve to be heard. To all those who contributed to bringing this e-book to life, and to every reader, we offer our sincere gratitude and hope that these few pages stay with you long after they close.

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EDUCATION

AFIFAH FANDI SAAB

(1900 – 1989)

Afifah Fandi Saab chose not to oppose the French mandate in the streets but rather through writings and speeches. She, only like very few others, succeeded in opening her very own school. She also stood still, inspiring people around her to fight for their rights.

AN UNUSUAL DEED

Born in 1900, Afifah Fandi Saab was the daughter of Fandi Kassem Saab and Latifa Hassan, a religious Druze couple who lived in Shwayfāt, Lebanon. Fandi was a *Shaykh Ṣulḥ* and Latifa was one of the few girls in her community who received school education prior to marriage, as she studied at the American School of Sidon.

The couple had eight children, six daughters and two sons, all of whom went to the British Boarding School in Beirut before permanently moving to Miss Procter School. Unfortunately, their education was harshly criticized by family, friends, and neighbors who claimed Fandi was harming his daughters' ethics and reputation. Zabad Saab, Afifah's sister, reported that her father would say, "we paid the fees this year, I will take them out of school next year," to silence critics (I. Saab, personal communication, June 21, 2001).

After graduating from school, Afifah traveled a lot seeking better opportunities. For four years, she lived and taught Arabic and English in Baghdad, before moving to Damascus where she became the Principal of the *Dawḥat al-ʿArab* High School for five years.

A FATHER'S BLESSING

Afifah's relationship with her father was one of mutual trust and unconditional support; Fandi seemed to have an enormous influence over his daughter's actions and achievements, and Afifah was very much devoted to him.

After the Saabs' financial situation deteriorated, Afifah decided to travel to the United States (U.S.) to raise money and build a school of her own. Fandi took a loan from a wealthy relative and joined his daughter on a long and tedious journey.

In the U.S., Afifah rigorously defended the Druze legacy and Arab belonging while encouraging members of the Druze community to fund women's education in their homeland. Afifah also spent her time writing poetry and prose, giving lectures, and attending debates to advocate for Arabism and Lebanese nationalism.

Unfortunately, however, during their time in the U.S., Fandi's health regressed, and Afifah was left to take care of him. On their last days together, she vowed not to get married and asked for his blessing to remove the *mandīl*. He agreed, insisting she removed it before his passing.

AN INDUSTRIOUS BEGINNING: THE JOURNAL

Upon returning to Lebanon, Afifah paid back her debts and embarked on her new journey. By 1919, she had already established a newspaper, *Majallat al-Khuḍr*, the first of its kind (Al-Beaini, 1989). It was a monthly periodical that dealt, for eight consecutive years, with matters of literature, politics, and Arab women's issues.

Afifah utilized the magazine to voice her opposition to the French occupation. Her articles and statements were known for their intense hostility both before and after the 1925 revolution against French rule, the most daring of which being *al-Gharīb fī Waṭanihi*. As a result, French authorities – after a sequence of warnings – closed the newspaper and sued Afifah who eventually lost the fight and was forced to stop publishing.

Afifah was supported by many; her circle of friends included May Ziadeh,[1] Mary Ajami,[2] Mary Yanni,[3] Ahmad Shaker al-Karmi,[4] Khalil Mardam Bey,[5] Ahmad Taqi al-Din,[6] and Ibtihaj Qaddura,[7] in addition to *Amīr* Nassib Arslan[8] and *Amīr* Shakib Arslan[9] who contributed to the journal. The support and encouragement she received fueled her enthusiasm to promote the right of women to receive an education. Yet, despite the support, Afifah and her sisters were criticized for their modernist ideas. From removing the *mandīl* to spending their time reading and learning, feudal lords and religious groups regarded the Saab sisters as a threat to society.

AFIFAH'S SCHOOL

The intimidation by the French authorities could not stop Afifah from continuing her educational mission. After getting her journal shut, Afifah decided to proceed with the school project in Beirut. Given, however, that her late father preferred that she and her sisters do not relocate to Beirut, they fulfilled his wish by opening the school in Aley.

To establish her project, Afifah requested a permit from the French authorities but was refused. According to Imad Saab, her nephew, "Afifah published an article condemning the French for not giving her what she wanted. Shortly after, to keep her from criticizing them further, they decided to give her the permit in 1924" (I. Saab, personal communication, June 10, 2001).

The permit, however, was conditional. The French insisted she could only open the school if the French language was to be taught to all students:

> *"At the beginning, the French authorities forced us to teach the French language, even though my sisters and I did not know French. We were English-educated. But eventually, when the French authorities left, we stopped teaching their language and focused on English instead."*
>
> (Z. Saab, personal communication, June 21, 2001)

Hence, the year they obtained the permit, Afifah and her two sisters, Fatimeh and Zabad Saab, started a school - *Kulliyyat al-Sīrāt*. At first, the school was a girl only establishment, but soon after, boys up to twelve years old were admitted. In 1972, Zabad took over the directorship until 1984, and Afifah continued to teach Arabic-to-English translation (Z. Saab, personal communication, June 21, 2001).

During the 1975 civil war, the sisters turned the school into a hospital that received wounded Druze and Maronite militiamen. It functioned as such for several years. To serve her mission of helping young men, Afifah went as far as mortgaging her house to support the hospital's costs. Unfortunately, the school was targeted and damaged.

After the fights came to a halt, the Saab sisters went back on track to serve the young generation which Afifah believed was endowed with exceptional potential and hope for a brighter future (Saab, 1947). By 1981, the school had 926 enrolled students. Afifah was among the very few, at that time, who were determined to support and educate young women. She worked hard to make her school a successful project against all odds (*Al-Ḥawādith,* 1975).

FIGHTING WITH WORDS

Throughout her life, Afifah's articles and literary works on the importance of nationalism, freedom and women's liberation were published by several magazines. Among them were a*l-Fajr*, *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda, al-Ḥayāt*, *al-Mīzān*, a*l-Jabal*, and *Ṣawt al-Marʾa*. According to Imad, Afifah "mainly focused on social and national liberation. She did not fight for women's liberation per se. She considered women's liberation as part of social liberation and improvement" (I. Saab, personal communication, June 10, 2001).

Additionally, Afifah is the author of an unpublished manuscript, and a book titled *Ḥatmiyyat al-Taṭawwur*. Her portfolio was also full of articles written in Arabic and the speeches she had given in Syria and Lebanon. Unfortunately, "most of her legacy was destroyed during the war in the village of Sūq al-Gharb, in 1983, where the fighting was heavy for a long time" (I. Saab, personal communication, June 10, 2001).

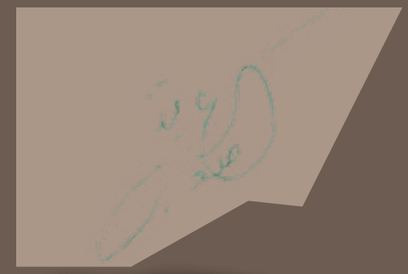
At the social level, Afifah joined *Jamʿiyyat al-Sayyidāt* among several other women's organizations; she would go from Shwayfāt to Beirut to participate in recurring meetings (*Al-Marʾa al-Jadīda*, 1923). She was a loud advocate of women's civic and political rights.

A SILENT DEPARTURE

Afifah died in 1989, suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Although she had stopped advocating for the liberation and emancipation of women and passed away in silence, she was not forgotten. Before she fell victim to her illness, the Lebanese government had awarded her the Lebanese Order of Merit.

"Afifah Saab was one of the first to carry a pen and address political and social issues. Her goal from the beginning was to serve the nation, serve humanity, and spread culture among different segments of the population."

(Nuwayhid, 1986, p. 441)



NOTES

1 May Ziadeh (1886-1941) was a Palestinian-Lebanese writer, poet, and a pioneer of the feminist awakening in the Arab region.

2 Mary Ajami (1888-1965) was a Syrian poet and feminist writer.

3 Mary Yanni (1895-1975) was a Lebanese-Syrian writer and the founder of *Minerva*, a local magazine.

4 Ahmad Shaker al-Karmi (1894-1955) was a Palestinian poet and writer.

5 Khalil Mardam Bey (1895-1959) was a Syrian poet and lyricist of the Syrian national anthem.

6 Ahmad Taqi al-Din (1888-1935) was a Lebanese poet and judge.

7 Ibtihaj Qaddura (1893–1967) was a Lebanese feminist and political activist.

8 Nassib Arslan (1868 –1927) was a Lebanese writer, poet, and politician.

9 Shakib Arslan (1869-1946) was a Lebanese writer, poet, historian, and politician.

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AMINAH KHOURY MAKDISI

(1876 – 1951)

Aminah Khoury Makdisi devoted her life to education and fought for women's emancipation. From establishing her own journal to publishing articles, books, and poetry, Aminah did it all.

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Born in 1876 in Tripoli, Lebanon, Aminah Khoury Makdisi was the daughter of Elias Khoury Makdisi and Mariam al-Beiruti. Her father, originally a Greek Orthodox priest, worked for several years as an accountant for a high school affiliated with the Evangelical Mission that helped him educate four of his children before converting to Protestantism.

In 1896, Aminah graduated from high school and began her teaching journey at several American and British schools in Lebanon, Egypt, and Turkey (Khairallah, 1996). For instance, she taught at the School of Prussia, which belonged to the Turks and later became, with the arrival of the French, *the Collège Protestant Français*. Later, Aminah and her sister Esther Makdisi joined the American School for Girls, which is currently the Lebanese American University (LAU), and graduated in 1906. Her brother, Anis Makdisi, was a distinguished educator (Khairallah, 1996), and her other brother Jirjis Makdisi was able to join the Syrian Protestant College, which is currently the American University of Beirut (AUB). Unfortunately, however, her two brothers Azar and Najib Makdisi had to stop their education and start working at an early age. According to her niece, Neda Makdisi Maalouf, Aminah was one of the most proficient students despite the difficulty of the educational system at the time (personal communication, January 12, 2001).

After a while, Aminah was asked by missionaries to oversee the establishment and management of an elementary missionary school, the National Evangelical School for Girls, in what is currently known as the Makdisi Street in Rās Beirut. She accepted the offer, even though she needed to take a long boat trip from Tripoli to Beirut. Aminah became the school director where she introduced acting and drama classes to the curriculum. Over the years, she supervised and directed ten plays: *al-Murūʾa wa al-Wafāʾ*, *al-Ṭarīq*, *Laylat al-Mīlād*, *al-Nashāṭ*, *al-Raʾī wa al-ʿabed*, *Qalb al-Ḥajar*, *al-Ḥasad*, *Jamʿiyyat al-Umam*, *Ḥifẓ al-Ṣiḥḥa*, *al-Simsār wa ʾAbṭāl al-Tārīkh*. Eventually, the school became known for graduating prominent figures like Adel Osseiran, Henri Philippe Pharaon, Dr. Saniya Habboub al-Naqqash, and Munah al-Solh.

Aminah dedicated her life to managing the school. She never got married; for several years, she resided on campus. She lived with her mother who spent her time reading the Bible, even though she was originally an illiterate woman.

OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

Alongside tending to the National Evangelical School, Aminah was the first woman teacher at AUB. She also significantly contributed to the writing scene, publishing articles in local journals such as *al-Nashra al-usbūʿiyya*, *al-Mawrid al-Ṣāfī*, *Majallat al-Marʾah al-Jadīda*, *Lisān al-Ḥāl*, *and Ṣawt al-Marʾa*. Then, in 1923, Aminah established her own journal, *Mawrid al-Aḥdāth* which remained in publication for three years (Khairallah, 1996). The journal focused on scientific and literary writing but was unique in producing a special addendum for children. Aminah published her own stories in the journal and in *al-Mawrid al-Ṣāfī*. Additionally, she translated a play *Esther* and published a book *Hayat Arbaʻah Min Shahirat al-Nisa'* in 1926, which is a biographical treatise on Florence Nightingale, Mary Elizabeth Frye, Alice Freeman Palmer, and Pandita Ramabai (Khairallah, 1996). She also wrote poems and *al-Zajal*, as well as children's rhymes (Nuwayhid, 1986).

On another note, Aminah was an avid member of several associations such as the Youth Federation, Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), *Yad al-Musāʿada,* the Lebanese Federation of Women, *Khayrīyāt Ṭarāblus*, *Jamʿīyyat Mutakharrijāt al-Madrasa al-Amrīkīya* and *Jamʿīyyat Nisāʾ Lubnān*. She remained a member of *Jamʿīyyat al-Nisāʾ* al-Tahdhībīya for 35 years and of *al-Ittiḥād al-Nisāʾ al-Lubnānī* for 25, where she chaired the Education Committee for 10 consecutive years. Overall, she presided over three of the associations mentioned above and helped in founding seven of them (Nuwayhid, 1986).

Furthermore, Aminah participated in several local conferences related to her social and educational interests as well as the following international conferences: *Al-Ittiḥād al-Nisāʾi al-ʿĀlamī* in Constantinople in 1934, and *al-Ittiḥād al-Nisāʾi al-ʿArabī* in Egypt in 1944. Her busy life, however, did not stop her from paying homage to her land and undertaking a pilgrimage to Jerusalem then touring Palestine, Syria and Lebanon (Nuwayhid, 1986).

HONORING AND RECOGNITION

Aminah's efforts received recognition and appreciation throughout her life. In 1946, she was awarded the Order of Merit by the Lebanese Government to celebrate her golden jubilee in the field of education under the auspices of President Bechara al-Khoury in West Hall, AUB. In her speech, she thanked the organizers and shared with the audience her experience as a professor (*Ṣawt al-Marʾa,* 1946).

Aminah passed away in 1951 at the age of 75 due to an accident that demanded the amputation of her leg. She had dedicated more than fifty years of her life to serving schools, organizations, and humanitarian associations (Nuwayhid, 1986). Following her death, the National Evangelical Church bought the school that she ran and relegated it to Rida Jureidini.

Aminah's memory was never forgotten; she remained alive in the minds of many, including her church parish and her students. While paying tribute to his alma matter, Munah stated the following:

الجزء الاول — المجلد الثاني

مورد الاحداث

شهر كانون الثاني سنة ١٩٢٤

بحق

المورد الصافي

مجلة تهذيبية علمية تاريخية تهذيب اخلاق الولد والفتاة بقراءة المقالة وتوسيع تصوراته وانهاج نفسه بما يدرج فيه من القصص الادبية والاخبار العلمية والحوادث التاريخية باسلوب بسيط يناسب ذوق الاحداث

تصدر اجزاء ستة في السنة

محررتها امينة الخوري المقدسي

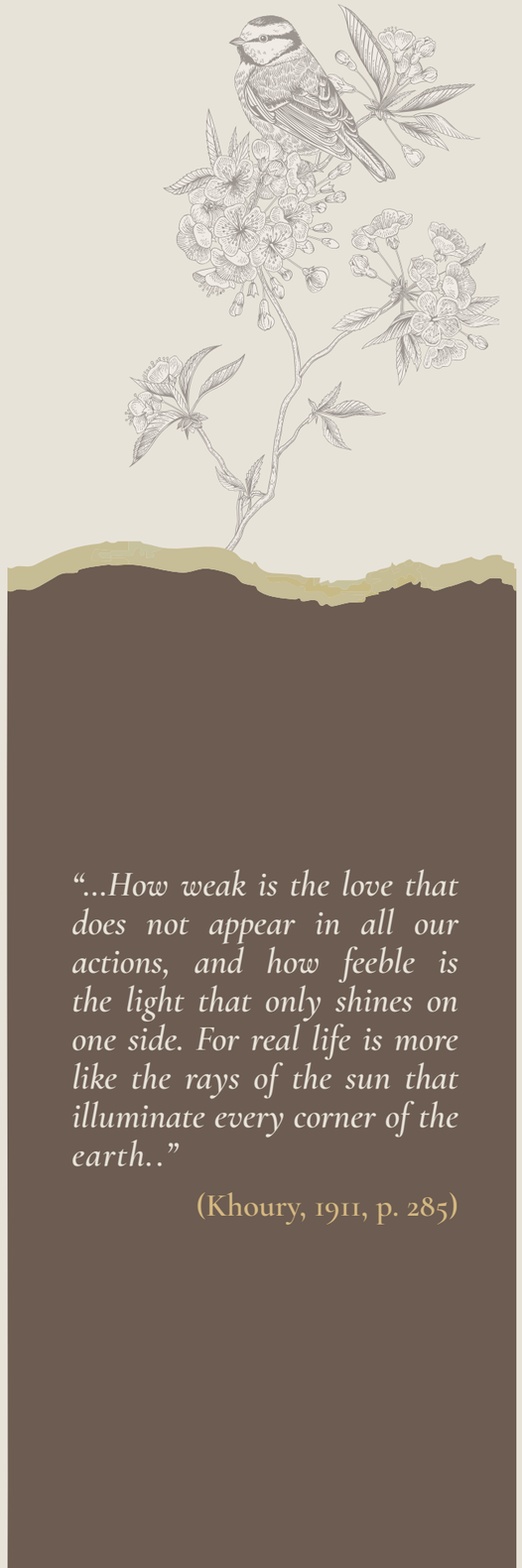
قيمة اشتراكها

٧٥ قرشاً سورياً في سوريا

٢٥ ... مصرياً خارجها

"I started my educational journey as a child in the unforgettable Ms. Aminah Makdisi's school which she had established during the French mandate and in the early periods of the independence, aiming to form it into a school that competes against prestigious foreign schools in terms of modernity, sophistication, and individual care for students. Ms. Makdisi utilized modern methods of teaching Arabic, French and English alongside mathematics and music by using audio-visual aids in weekly lessons and guiding religious conversations on Sundays. The school would also organize trips to different parts of the country, to introduce students to the nation's rich historical heritage. In addition to this, each student had a personal garden in the school's playground to care for and nurture as a way of fostering the value of caring for the environment in each student… To also give back to the community of Rās Beirut, students and teachers would participate in each religious holiday and distribute gifts to people from all sects. By doing so, the holiday for one religious sect would become a holiday for all… I remember that the old school was located on what is known today as al-Makdessi Street, parallel to Hamra Street; I imagine that it was a unique, modern, and nurturing world for those within the school and those outside it. The school had a noticeable impact on the Rās Beirut society… It was a source of enlightenment and progressive development, as well as spiritual, natural, and humanitarian beauty."

(Al-Solh, n.d., pp. 27-28)



"…How weak is the love that does not appear in all our actions, and how feeble is the light that only shines on one side. For real life is more like the rays of the sun that illuminate every corner of the earth.."

(Khoury, 1911, p. 285)

NOTES

1 Adel Osseiran (1905–1998) was speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, serving from 1953 to 1959.

2 Henri Philippe Pharaon (1901–1993) was a Lebanese Minister of Foreign Affairs, serving intermittently between 1945 and 1947.

3 Saniya Habboub al-Naqqash (1901–1983) was a pioneering Lebanese woman gynecologist.

4 Munah al-Solh (1927-2014) was a Lebanese newspaper editor and political activist.

5 Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) was a British nurse and philanthropist.

6 Mary Elizabeth Frye (1905–2004) was an American poet.

7 Alice Freeman Palmer (1855–1902) was an American educator and former president of Wellesley College.

8 Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922) was an Indian social reformer and Christian missionary.

9 Bechara al-Khoury (1890-1964) was the first President of Lebanon, serving from 1943 to 1952.

10 Rida Jureidini (1900-1905) was a Lebanese educator, writer, and philanthropist.

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FARIDAH AKL

(1877 – 1976)

Faridah Akl is a teacher of generations; she was the one who taught Arabic to Lawrence of Arabia. For many people, she is considered to have helped a great man along his path to success.

THE CHILDHOOD OF AN AVID READER

Born in 1877 in Muḥaydītha, Lebanon, Faridah Akl was the eldest daughter of Ibrahim Akl, an owner of a silk factory, and Bassima Safrawi. The family of seven moved to Brummānā and Faridah joined Brummana High School where the Quakers had just established themselves.

In 1891, at only 14 years old, Faridah was teaching Arabic and English at the Rās al-Matn Primary School and would journey on horseback between Brummānā and Rās al-Matn. Unfortunately, Faridah did not get the chance to further pursue her education in college. Instead, she took it upon herself to get acquainted with books on different topics to satisfy her intellectual curiosity. In her home in Brummānā, the stacks of books served as proof of her love for knowledge.

A LIFELONG FRIENDSHIP WITH LAWRENCE OF ARABIA

In 1909, Thomas Edward Lawrence,[1] otherwise known as Lawrence of Arabia, visited Lebanon to study the towers built during the Crusades for his thesis. He then joined the American Presbyterian School in Jbeil to learn Arabic. At that time, Faridah, who taught there, became his first Arabic teacher (Benson-Gyles, 2016).

Due to the harsh weather and heavy snow, Lawrence's brief visit extended to a two-month stay that began in Christmas and ended in mid-February. Throughout his stay, Lawrence and Faridah established a strong friendship despite their age difference. The twenty-one-year-old became acquainted with his teacher's family as he would regularly visit Faridah in her father's home next to Brummānā. Similarly, Faridah met Lawrence's brothers and became very attached to them.

After Lawrence left Lebanon to continue his education, he maintained his friendship with Faridah. They continuously sent letters to each other and arranged secret motorcycle visits between Lebanon and Jordan.

A HEARTBREAKING DEATH

In May 1935, Lawrence passed away from a motorcycle accident at forty-seven-years-old leaving Faridah devastated for years. According to Renée Baz, one of Faridah's students and friends, Faridah would talk about his humanity and cleverness. When asked about what he means to her, she would say, "he is the dearest to my heart, but that doesn't mean that we're in love" (R. Baz, personal communication, September 10, 2003).

To honor his life and death, Faridah requested that Renée carry a cedar shoot all the way to England and plant it on Lawrence's grave (*Al-Anwār*, 1998). She also sent presents to two ladies: Arabella Regentin and Helen Cash, both of whom wrote about Lawrence (R. Baz, personal communication, September 10, 2003). Faridah went a step further and chose to keep the subject of her meetings and letters with Lawrence confidential. She would not discuss them even with her niece, Olivia Sahyoun, who had lived with her since 1948. Years after Faridah's death, Olivia maintained her house, garden, and the picture of Lawrence she had hung up to preserve her legacy.

A RUMORED ROMANCE

Throughout the years, people speculated about the nature of Faridah's relationship with Lawrence, hinting that they either had an affair or were secretly in love. The rumors peaked when she requested to have Lawrence's picture buried with her. While Faridah's discretion about their relationship might have kept the rumors on her romance with Lawrence under control, the visits she received after his death did not. In 1958, Prince Philip[2] visited Faridah at her home in Brummānā to honor Lawrence of Arabia's memory by paying his respects to the woman who taught him Arabic.

Similarly, Renée recalls accompanying Faridah to a meeting with three British writers in complete secrecy at the Saint Georges Hotel, in which Faridah brought her letters from Lawrence and showed them to the writers; nevertheless, "she let them see some of the letters and kept the rest to herself" (*Al-Anwār*, 1998, p. 19). Additionally, "the Duke of Kent, accompanied by journalist and writer Michael Bunion, a close friend of Lawrence, paid a secret visit to Faridah's home in Brummānā (p. 17).

The late Albert Kamel refuted the rumors regarding Lawrence and Faridah's affair, stating that Lawrence came on army business: "Their relationship was one of friendship. Faridah was a saint with a strong and loving personality. The stories about them having an affair are just sheer talk... I personally think that he came to Lebanon on army business" (*Al-Anwār*, 1998, p. 19).

A LASTING IMPACT

After beginning her teaching journey at Brummana High School, she established the Primary Section and the Sunday School. Till her last breath, Faridah would attend the Brummana High School meetings, give educational lectures, and go to Baʿlabak to attend festivals. She used to gather the school-teachers for afternoon tea every Thursday. She also reached out to students and would bring children to her home and teach them to write Arabic. Furthermore, she helped to raise scholarship funds for children who could not afford Brummana High School's tuition. Throughout her life, she remained active and was never tired of spending time outdoors. Even bombs could not keep her in (R. Baz, personal communication, September 10, 2003).

Faridah touched the lives of many, although not all are as chronicled or as publicized as those of Lawrence of Arabia or as personal as Olivia's. Faridah was a woman who was genuinely interested in raising generations. Throughout her life, she kept her personal memories under wraps only because of her belief in respecting the privacy of the people surrounding her. As for her work and devotion in the educational field, she will always be the "Able Lady," a role model for future generations to follow.

Renée recalls how Faridah influenced her personal life: *"She is the reason why I married my husband, Najib, and she was one of the people who signed our marriage papers. Faridah attended the Friends' meetings of the Quaker society established in Brummānā. When Najib Baz told her that he wanted to get married and was looking for a wife, she suggested that he marry me (Renée) and she was one of the people who married us according to the Quaker tradition."*

(personal communication, September 10, 2003)

Faridah had given Lawrence of Arabia's letters to her niece's son, Naji, who passed away at a young age. The letters were then transferred to Naji's brother, Fayez, who had put them up for auction in London.

(Al-Anwār, 1998)

NOTES

1. Thomas Edward Lawrence (1888-1935) was a British Army officer, diplomat, archaeologist, diplomat and writer.
2. Prince Philip (1991-2021) was the Duke of Edinburgh and husband of Queen Elizabeth II (1926-2022) of the United Kingdom.

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IHSAN MAHMASSANI

(1912 – 2005)

The name of this resourceful Lebanese educator has been associated for almost half a century with Jamʿīyyat al-Maqāṣid al-Khayrīyya al-Islāmīyya and its academic renaissance. She excelled in her profession and was admired by her peers. Her influence continues to be felt in the schools that she directed.

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Born in 1912, Ihsan Mahmassani was raised in a notable Beiruti family. She graduated from the American School for Girls (ASG) in Beirut and later earned her first diploma from the American Junior College for Women (AJCW), which is currently the Lebanese American University (LAU). Later, Ihsan obtained a second degree from the University of London. According to her nephew, Ghaleb Mahmassani:

"The prevailing atmosphere in the family where she grew up was one where education was highly valued. All my aunts were schoolteachers except for one who was a writer. My grandfather was a businessman but did not force any of his children to work with him. All his children received a good education and excelled in their fields. It was in the 1920s, the golden age of education. It is important to know that no one in the family wore a veil; it was the norm in the family then not to wear one. My aunt Ihsan was brought up in a family that believed in this country and who offered two martyrs for Lebanon. She also had a female cousin who was an activist and had four professional brothers who all excelled in their own fields. Therefore, she and her sisters followed in the footsteps of their family and pursued higher education."

(personal communication, May 3, 2006)

AN EDUCATOR LIKE NO OTHER

In 1933, Ihsan and her sister, Salwa Mahmassani, decided to join the educational field upon a formal request addressed to their father from *Jamʿīyyat al-Maqāṣid al-Khayrīyya al-Islāmīyya*. Initially, Ihsan's father did not want his daughters to work as the family was financially stable. However, he agreed after Ihsan and Salwa convinced him of their passion for education, especially after he realized that the main objective of the association was to educate children of the Muslim community.

At the beginning of their careers at the *Jamʿīyyat al-Maqāṣid al-Khayrīyya al-Islāmīyya*, Ihsan taught philosophy, History, and Geography, and Salwa taught Arabic. Ihsan was then given an administrative position at *Fāṭima al-Zahrāʾ* School in Raʾs al-Nabaʿ, and five years later, she was appointed first Associate Principal and then Principal of *Thānawiyyat al-Banāt*. In due course, Ihsan went to England to continue her training in the newest methods and techniques of education. Then in 1955, she became the principal of both the boarding and non-boarding sections of *Bayt al-Aṭfāl* School, the first kindergarten established by Jamʿīyyat al-Maqāṣid al-Khayrīyya al-Islāmīyya around 1945-1946. Over time, *Bayt al-Aṭfāl* evolved into an elementary school, then an intermediate school and then into a secondary school (*Thānawiyyat Khālid bin al-Walīd,* 1963-1964, p. 43).

Trained in a variety of educational techniques, Ihsan knew how to navigate between firmness and leniency making use of her own dexterity, in-depth studies, and the novel ideas she acquired from abroad. She became renowned for her motto: "You should handle the matter in a very balanced way" (Nasser & Bader, n.d.), and her solid judgement. She was also qualified to guide her peers and help them in their duties. Throughout her journey, she challenged common educational patterns and implemented a coeducational system to abolish different treatment of boys and girls seeking an education. Her main goal for the school consisted of creating a generation of good and hard-working citizens, as well as encouraging them to have a sense of belonging to one's country and the Arab region (*Thānawiyyat Khālid bin al-Walīd,* 1963-1964). As one of her Saudi students recalled:

"The Lebanese national anthem was powerful in my upbringing and my love for my country Saudi Arabia. I am grateful to Ihsan Mahmassani for teaching me the importance of respecting our school, teachers, and, in turn, others – including my husband, family, and extended family. She has ingrained these values in me from a young age."

(Al-Ghazi, 1996, p. 51)

Over the years, *Bayt al-Aṭfāl* became known as *Khālid bin al-Walīd* High School, a pioneer of gender equality in Lebanon's educational system. In her endeavors, Ihsan found herself among competent teachers who helped her in implementing her mission; together, they reformed and developed new educational techniques that are suitable for coeducational schools. Among her most trusted teachers were Ihsan Naamani, Hala Moumneh, and Wajiha Idriss Wazzan. Thus, by reforming educational methods, Ihsan played a major role in improving the Lebanese educational system.

A CHERISHED AUNT

When mentioning Ihsan, one cannot but remember the words of her nephew Ghaleb. He stated:

"I remember that my aunt Ihsan was an exceptional teacher. When the Jamʿīyyat al-Maqāṣid al-Khayrīyya al-Islāmīyya founded Bayt al-Aṭfāl, it was something small and very local, and the person who was running it before her either died or retired. So, she was appointed as its principal. At the time, she did not consider that step to be a significant one, but it turned out to be the chance of a lifetime. Bayt al-Aṭfāl soon became a high school where all the Arabs of the region started to send their children. It was the first school founded by the Jamʿīyyat al-Maqāṣid al-Khayrīyya al-Islāmīyya that was successful in its modern and new standards of education. It is worth noting that its students paid relatively high fees for their education... Until now, when I meet people from the Gulf, they ask me whether Ihsan Mahmassani is a relative of mine; they all say that either they or their children were her students."

(G. Mahmassani, personal communication, May 3, 2006)

He added:

"She was strict and kind at the same time. She knew how to choose her words and was able to deal with politicians, administrators, students and their parents. She was a brave and strong woman, ukht al-rijāl as they used to call her. She had nine siblings (five girls and four boys). Even though my father had a strong and firm personality, she influenced him, and he often consulted her over certain issues, asking for her opinion since she was older than him. We were close and used to joke together; she used to call me 'partner' since I was the eldest of her nephews."

(personal communication, May 3, 2006)

RETIREMENT AND DEATH

Ihsan decided to leave the *Jamʿīyyat al-Maqāṣid al-Khayrīyya al-Islāmīyya* at the end of the academic year of 1978-1979. Throughout her career, she received two awards in recognition of her many years of service devoted to education, one of which was the Golden Medal Award for Public Schools in 1955, followed by the Loyal Platter from the Students' Committee on Teachers' Day in 1992. When talking about Ihsan's life, one of her sisters recalled:

"When her foot stepped onto the school grounds, the entire school would shake due to her might and strong personality. She was extremely devoted to her school. One can find her at the school at any time and specifically during the difficult times that the country went through. During the earthquake she was there; under heavy bombardments she was there... Truly, she is an archetype educator who acquired an excellent reputation and was highly respected and appreciated."

(Nasser & Bader, n.d, p. 13)

When Ihsan started teaching, her salary then was 30 Lebanese pounds, the maximum amount ever paid by *al-Maqāṣid al-Khayrīyya al-Islāmīyya* in those days.

(Nasser & Bader, n.d)

Ihsan died on January 16, 2005. During the memorial service, Dr. Hicham Nashabeh paid tribute to her, mourning the loss of an outstanding woman who left a deep impression on the evolution of the Jamʿīyyat al-Maqāṣid al-Khayrīyya al-Islāmīyya. Her 40 years of service and her memory lingers, as the new principal, Ms. Thouraya Wehbeh, reminds all those who visit her school

Ihsan turned *Bayt al-Aṭfāl* into one of the first coeducational Islamic schools in Lebanon where the staff emphasized the importance of education, discipline, religion, originality, and autonomy.

NOTES

1 Hisham Nashabe (1892-1973) was a prominent Lebanese scholar.

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JULIA TU'MAH DIMASHQIYAH

(1880-1954)

Julia Tu'mah Dimashqiyah was the voice of the new powerful woman. She assumed the mission to better her life and that of others.

FAMILY BACKGROUND AND EDUCATION

Born in 1880 in Mukhtāra, Lebanon, Julia Tu'mah Dimashqiyah was raised in a prominent Christian family of seven. Little is known about her mother Farida Nassif. However, her father, Jiryis Tu'mah, was a schoolteacher. He was feared by his wife and children, but not by Julia who often stood up to him. Their special relationship, paired with his strong beliefs in the benefits of education, made it possible for Julia to thrive.

Julia's educational journey began in Mukhtāra with the help of the English Missionaries. At the age of 10, she was chosen among students at her school to attend the American School for Girls in Sidon. Four years later in 1896, she continued her education in Shwayfāt School where she obtained her teaching diploma.

JOURNEY AS AN EDUCATOR

Julia's career as an educator began when she was recommended by the director of the Shwayfāt School to fill a teaching position at an English school in Palestine. Although she was rejected from the position for being "too beautiful for a teacher" (N. Dimashqiyah, personal communication, July 18, 2001), Julia remained determined to land the job. Her son, Nadim Dimashqiyah, reports:

"Overcome by disappointment, Julia returned to her room, took a pair of scissors and cut off her long tresses. Then she pulled the short stiff hair behind her ears and went out to see the teacher for… a more successful interview."

(personal communication, July 18, 2001)

Julia then remained at the school in Palestine for a few years until her mother's passing, after which she chose to return to Brummānā, Lebanon where her family was residing. Her decision emerged from an eagerness to help support her four siblings after the family lost most of their wealth and assets.

JULIA AND JURJI BAZ

In 1906, Julia became acquainted with Jurji Baz.[1] He was taken aback at the sight of Julia reading *al-Muqtaṭaf* journal along the main road in Ḍhūr al-Shwair. To recall their first meeting at an exhibition later that day, he stated, "I noticed in her a distinguished readiness to learn and a certain desire to contribute to the general welfare… Often, thereafter, we went with my friends for walks, and Julia was our conversationalist" (Abi Daher, 1991-1992, p. 80).

Following their introduction, Julia and Jurji would often go on walks in Ḍhūr al-Shwair with some of his friends. They encouraged Julia, who always carried a journal, to publish her writings in newspapers. She disagreed and stated the following: "I fear people will spurn me if they do not like what I write, or that they will think it is my father writing for me and that I am simply signing my name" (Baz, 1954, p. 12).

Following further support from Jurji and his friends, Julia started sending articles for publications (Baz, 1954).

Jurji's support of Julia persisted; in 1910, he encouraged her to give three speeches on different occasions. Her first appearance was during the Association to Fight Tuberculosis meeting at *al-Tiyātrū al-Kabīr* in downtown Beirut (Khairallah, 1996). The 17-year-old confidently got on the stage and spoke so well that one of the attendees asserted that "the room was drizzling with gold"

JULIA AND MADRASAT AL-MAQĀṢID LIL-BANĀT

(Nasrallah, 2001, p. 44). The other two talks took place in Baḥamdūn and Tripoli and were equally impressive, but her first appearance had the biggest influence on her life.

One day as Julia walked down Bliss Street with a friend, she was suddenly knocked over by Ali Salam's horse. Not knowing what to do, Ali Salam Khalidi, Anbara Salam Khalidi's[2] older brother, ran away. When Salim Ali Salam, then President of *al-Maqāṣid al-Khayrīyya al-Islāmīyya,* learned about what happened, he and Anbara's mother rushed to the hospital to apologize for their son's misbehavior and offered to help. Badr Dimashqiyah,[3] who later became her husband, accompanied them on several visits to check on Julia.

After the visits, Salim and Badr were captivated by her intellect, wisdom, and open-mindedness. As the friendship grew between Julia and the two men, Salim offered her an administrative position at the *Madrasat al-Maqāṣid lil-Banāt* with the freedom to introduce any academic changes deemed necessary, an exceptional offer that the 28-year-old could not refuse. Julia succeeded in her role as administrator and *Madrasat Maqāṣid lil-Banāt* became a model for other girl schools. Julia motivated her students to study the lives of international prominent women and guided them to valuable extracurricular readings. She also exposed them to al-Muqtaṭaf, *al-Hilāl, al-Zuhūr* and Jurji's magazine *al-Ḥasnā* ʾ.

According to Anbara, who was once Julia's student before she became her friend:

"She was a woman of strong personality, always with a graceful appearance, and making a space for herself in the hearts of all those who meet her… in addition, she had a certain courage in her work that pushed her to take on the role of heading the Maqāṣid Islamic School, and she [was] a Christian girl who had never left her own environment prior to that point. She would knock down any obstacle that came between her and her work. She [was] always the guiding teacher regardless of the circumstances."

(Al-Khalidi, 1978, p. 155)

Throughout her time at *Madrasat al-Maqāṣid Lil-Banāt,* Julia resided with the Salams for approximately two years. In her memoirs, Anbara shared her memories of Julia and described the impression she made on those around her. She stated:

"She was met with respect and appreciation from everyone that met her and she approached her work with an open heart and loving spirit that touched her students, teachers, and the members of the association. She even had a charming effect on her students and their parents whom she had contacted. The students were very attached to her: a word from her was enough to get a student to achieve whatever her teacher demanded in an attempt to please her. She often spent endless hours with us, showcasing the importance of having good morals and values… and pushing us to hold on to self-dignity… She had her ideals which she instilled in us with tenderness, so we would listen to all she had to say and were eager to please her… She also guided us to learn more about great international women and to read useful readings outside the school curriculum, as such, we eagerly would read whatever we could get our hands on from these readings."

(Al-Khalidi, 1978, pp. 67-68)

In fact, Julia encountered opposition to her avant-garde teaching methods, mainly after adding music and singing to the curriculum. However, Julia's students would read her speeches and remember her years later as one of the great orators of her time despite the backlash.

JULIA: A WIFE AND A MOTHER

Julia's journey at the *Madrasat al-Maqāṣid lil-Banāt* came to an abrupt end when Badr developed an admiration for her that grew into an infatuation. By 1912, Beirut society was gossiping about a suspected liaison between them. However, Badr was married and had three children. Julia fled to Egypt in an attempt to escape her pursuer's insistent pleas, but Badr went after her and divorced his wife. He finally found Julia in Cairo and eventually succeeded in convincing her to marry him.

When Julia and Badr got married, the couple were in their thirties. They tied the knot in Cairo, spent their honeymoon in Switzerland, and then returned to live in Beirut. On the day of their return, a closed carriage awaited the newlyweds at the seaport to discreetly escort them to their home. People stood on balconies to see who stole Badr Dimashqiyah's heart.

Toward the beginning of their marriage, because of their different religious backgrounds, Badr's community in Muṣayṭaba found it difficult to accept an unveiled Christian bride. Nadim recalled:

"When they got married, my father had a house in Muṣayṭaba where they were supposed to live… The day they returned from their honeymoon… my mother, wanting to show consideration for my father's community, chose to cover her hair with a scarf. My father immediately protested and insisted that she never change anything in her beliefs and behavior just to please his community. He was daring in this sense - he told her: 'You are Christian, and you remain Christian… you do not have to change your religion, or your beliefs,' and so it was. They lived for four or five months in the house at Basta, but my mother could sense the pressure my father was undergoing because of her background, so my father rented the house of his friend Omar al-Daouk[4] and they moved to live in the Rās Beirut area, near the American University of Beirut (AUB)."

(N. Dimashqiyah, personal communication, July 18, 2001)

Two years into their marriage, Julia and Badr had a daughter, Salwa, and Nadim Dimashqiyah was born five years later. When asked about the religious difference between his parents and its influence on him and his sister, he answered:

"Our house was secular… At the same time, however, I used to have a Catholic governess. When my mother visited her home village of Mukhtāra, I used to go to church with her… I also remember that I used to read the Qur'ān from time to time… All in all, however, we did not have a religious upbringing. My father and my mother… always repeated to us that, if a person was a good speaker, he or she could be a good Muslim and a good Christian. Politeness mattered most to them; It is what they valued most. As for the issue of religion, they did not try to influence us in any direction and, as a result, half of my friends were Muslim, and the other half were Christian. I never experienced any problem with any of them."

(N. Dimashqiyah, personal communication, July 18, 2001)

As a mother, Julia was determined to raise her children in the best way possible. On Salwa's fifteenth birthday, she offered her a painting of two joined hands and the words "I promise God and myself not to say, or do, or think about anything I fear to express in front of God or people" as a means of setting her on the right path. Years later, Salwa passed the painting to her children hanging it over their beds. To Nadim, Julia was an understanding and supportive mother; to describe their relationship he said:

"Undoubtedly, she influenced me, and her ideas shaped my thinking… When I was a teenager, she knew how to handle me. She listened to me, gave me advice, without trying to change my mind. The mental interaction between my mother and I was always special… During our daily interactions, we always exchanged ideas. My mother always motivated us to express ourselves, and when she read the newspaper in the evening, she always shared comments with us… We were quite young when we already knew about writers such as Ameen Rihani[5] and Gibran Khalil Gibran.[6]"

(personal communication, July 18, 2001)

"My mother was more democratic than my father. People always came to her seeking help to solve their problems… She was highly educated, which enabled her to have a better understanding of people and life. My father was not tolerant, whereas my mother always tried to find excuses for people's mistakes… She was forgiving and was always willing to help people when they were in trouble."

(N. Dimashqiyah, personal communication, July 18, 2001)

As a couple, Julia and Badr shared a desire to live a socially and culturally rich existence by enjoying people's company, especially intellectuals. Yet, despite their common traits, they had different personalities:

JULIA'S SALON

Around 1915, Julia initiated at her house biweekly informal gatherings between her friends and former students. She hoped to limit the damage caused by sectarian and political differences among the Lebanese people and provide an intellectual meeting place for women. As time passed, the meetings became more structured and included educated people from all religions and backgrounds.

In 1917, Julia founded *Jamʿiyyat al-Sayyidāt* to provide women of all confessions with a space to express themselves while promoting literacy and cultural knowledge. Members would gather in her home on a monthly basis to discuss, debate, and promote women's emancipation. Overall, *Jamʿiyyat al-Sayyidāt* was dedicated to improving the lives of Arab women and helping them participate in the modern movement of women's emancipation. Additionally, she ensured cooperation and understanding between members of different religions and encouraged women to publish their opinions and speak in public. The meetings dedicated to the activities of *Jamʿiyyat al-Sayyidāt* gradually transformed from informal gatherings into intellectual circles to discuss literature, social issues, and current affairs (excluding politics) and to combat poverty and sickness.

It is important to note that while the association itself restricted its membership to women, the salon was open to men, too. "*Sitt* Julia's salon," as it came to be known, was frequented by professors and several Arab writers and poets. Julia's closest ties from among prominent Arab women included May Ziadeh,[7] Salma Sayegh,[8] Rose Shehfeh,[9] and Anbara Salam al-Khalidi.[10]

AL-MAR'A AL-JADĪDA AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

By April 1921, Julia had already gained support and recognition for her work with *Jamʿiyyat al-Sayyidāt*. Following the French occupation, the chief medical officer of the French army visited her and asked her to join the Red Cross as its treasurer.

After the 1922 elections, Badr helped Julia establish *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda* women's journal where she was responsible for editorial tasks and Badr was the financial manager. Badr bought her a printing press and she quickly built two small rooms in their garden where, together, they established the offices of *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda*. The printing press was Badr's wedding gift to Julia, upon her request. The articles Julia included in the publications and the editorials she wrote reflected her firm belief in advancing women's rights. The motto of the magazine was *al-Umma Nasīj al-Ummahāt*, which means a nation is the product of mothers.

Educating others was one of Julia's principal occupations, a trait emphasized in statements made by her son Nadim and more so by her granddaughter Reema who stated:

"Educating children was my grandmother's principal occupation. Even after she became ill and could not move out of her bed, she proceeded with her educational mission…This was the major purpose behind the magazine al-Marʾa al-Jadīda which included, in addition to educational matters, recipes which my grand-mother mastered… She was bedridden when she taught me how to bake a cake, which I still do to this day. She gave me the recipe as she sat in her bed and the cake was always a success."

(R. Shehade, personal communication, June 12, 2001)

Al-Marʾa al-Jadīda went on for seven years with the contribution of many prominent authors. The last issue was published in 1927 due to money shortage. Fortunately, however, the other two magazines she established, *Nadīm al-Ṣaghīr* in 1925 and *al-Nadīm* in 1933, remained in publication. Additionally, Julia also headed the following organizations: Education of Girls and the Syrian Lebanese Women's Union.

HONORING AND RECOGNITION

Julia's health deteriorated rapidly at the beginning of the 1930s. She was forced to become almost fully bedridden due to back problems and by the age of fifty she had become fully bedridden. The injury she developed when the horse knocked her over had never fully healed. Nevertheless, she received visitors who came to seek advice, encouragement, and inspiration. Julia also continued writing and publishing in journals such as *al-Nashra al-usbūʿiyya, Lubnān*, *al-Ḥasnāʾ*, *al-Fatāt,* al-*Fajr*, and *Ṣawt al-Marʾa*

In May 1947, Julia was awarded the Grand Order of the Cedar by Bechara al-Khoury[11] for her outstanding effort in the service of her country. Unable to get up, Julia received the medal in bed. On that occasion, Anbara Salam al-Khalidi gave out an appraisal to Julia who listened silently as Anbara highlighted her impressive character and achievements. When her turn came to speak, Julia addressed her daughter asking her to safeguard the medal and present it to the first Lebanese woman to become a Member of Parliament (MP). A few years later, Salwa fulfilled her mission presenting the medal to Myrna al-Bustani[12] in 1963. While Julia never explicitly asked for political rights for women, her wish to dedicate her medal to the first woman MP certainly implied that she strongly supported such rights.

At the age of 71, Julia had both witnessed and partaken in the emancipation of women in her country in the fields of education and culture. Encouraged by her family and friends, she began to write her autobiography with Salwa's help.

Unfortunately, Julia's illness prevented her from finishing her memoir, which was supposed to reflect the life she lived, a life rich in intellectual endeavors, selfless generosity, and service to her community (Nuwayhid, 1986). Julia passed away at the age of 72 on August 13, 1954. A large crowd attended her funeral, among whom were government representatives. The eulogy in *Ṣawt al-Marʾa* described the death of Julia as a painful loss to Lebanon and the Arab World:

"[With her] death, the far-reaching, endless, and passionate light that glowed in the world of women was gone. The mother of all writers, and educator of all generations has died. The charming modernizer and pioneering feminist journalist has gone… For 20 years, from her bed, she continued teaching, guiding, encouraging her visitors in a sincere and moving tone, and a never-ending willpower."

(*Ṣawt al-Marʾa*, 1954, p. 41)

A few months after Julia's death, *Ṣawt al-Marʾa* dedicated a whole issue to her memory. One of the articles comprised a series of eulogies assembled from local newspapers such as Beirut, *al-Nahār, Ṣadā Lubnān, al-Zawābiʿ, Jarīdat al-Miṣrī,* and *al-Ḥayāt*. However, the most memorable note to Julia's memory may be one that comes from one of her young relatives:

"When I first met her, I was about 16. She made people feel at ease, and could talk with persons of all ages. She adored her children, her "two jewels" she called them… She was an extremely open-minded person, and pressed people to read. She had an angelic spirit, even when bedridden. Her advice was: Don't be first, don't be last; follow the middle course. Don't push yourselves forward, so that people don't malign you."

(Khairallah, 1996, pp. 190-191)

A while later, Jiryis asked Julia to find him a second wife. Without her father's knowledge, she chose her stepmother to be a deaf woman.

In the mid 1930s, Julia's reputation as an accomplished speaker earned her a great honor. In 1935, Adèle Nucho asked Julia to give a speech at the International Conference for Women in Istanbul:

"Two very important ladies were impressed by her speech, Lady Esther who was the first lady to become member of the British parliament, and Mrs. Bower who headed a feminist political movement in the United States (U.S.) at the time. Upon my mother's invitation, Mrs. Bower spent a couple of weeks at our house after the conference. One day during the Second World War, a British lieutenant came and knocked on our door and presented himself. He was Lady Esther's son. He had come to visit my mother upon his mother's request. Throughout his stay in Lebanon, he used to come and lunch with us every day and spend at least half an hour chatting with my mother who was bedridden by that time."

(N. Dimashqiyah, personal communication, July 18, 2001)

NOTES

1 Jurji Baz (1881-1959) was a prominent twentieth century Lebanese renaissance figure, writer, historian, and journalist.

2 Anbara Salam Khalidi (1897-1986) was a Lebanese feminist, translator, and writer.

3 Badr Dimashqiyah (1881-1952) was responsible for the education department in al-Maqāṣid Islamic Charitable Association.

4 Omar al-Daouk (1875-1949) was a Lebanese politician and philanthropist, who served as the mayor of Beirut from 1908 to 1925.

5 Ameen Rihani (1876-1940) was a Lebanese-American writer, intellectual, and political activist.

6 Gibran Khalil Gibran (1883-1931) was a prominent Lebanese-American writer, poet, and philosopher.

7 May Ziadeh (1886-1941) was a Palestinian-Lebanese writer, poet, and a pioneer of the feminist awakening in the Arab region.

8 Salma Sayegh (1889–1953) was a Lebanese writer and feminist activist.

9 Rose Shehfeh (1890–1955) was a Lebanese writer and women's rights activist.

10 Anbara Salam al-Khalidi (1897-1986) was a Lebanese feminist, translator, and writer.

11 Bechara al-Khoury (1890-1964) was the first President of Lebanon, serving from 1943 to 1952.

12 Myrna Emile Bustani (1937) is a Lebanese former parliamentarian, businesswoman, philanthropist.

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MARY KASSAB

(1881-1975)

Mary Kassab was an outstanding educator who fought for literacy and patriotism. She established the al-'Ahliyya National School for Girls in Beirut and made it one of the most prominent educational institutions in Lebanon.

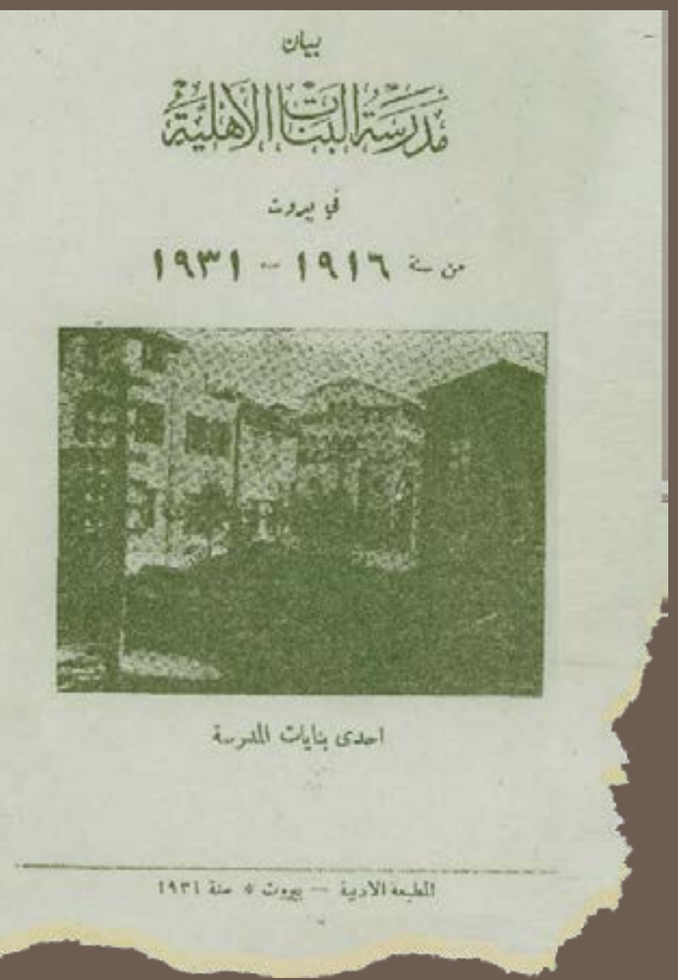
BACKGROUND & EDUCATION

Born in 1881 into a Damascene family, Mary Kassab was the daughter of Salim and Fumia Kassab. Her father was a renowned teacher of Arabic literature and a Protestant preacher, and her mother was the founder of one of the earliest Christian women's religious societies *al-Akhawiyya al-Masīhiyya* in 1880.

Mary received her education at the British Syrian Training College in Beirut, also known as the English School, from where she graduated in 1910. She taught at the English school until the First World War broke out and the Ottoman authorities forced all schools to shut down. During that time, Mary was approached by parents who wanted her to tutor their children. According to her niece, Mira Sinno, "finding herself deprived of teaching and seeing her nephew Raja without schooling pushed her to gather a few pupils to educate them" (personal communication, April 14, 2006). When Mary started her project, she only had six students. However, in less than a year, her success rallied incredible support, and her individual efforts to establish a well-organized educational establishment became a public cause (Nuwayhid, 1986). Shortly after, members of society and parents even encouraged Mary to start her own school.

FROM MISS MARY KASSAB'S SCHOOL TO AL-MADRASA AL-'AHLIYYA LIL-BANĀT

In 1916, Mary secured a license from the Ottoman authorities to establish a national secular school for boys and girls. A committee was formed to find a suitable building for the new school and the choice fell on a house in Muṣayṭaba, Beirut. By 1917, the location became known as Miss Mary Kassab's School. Soon after, the number of students increased, and the school relocated to a new building.


بيان

مدرسة البنات الأهلية

في بيروت

من سنة ١٩١٦ - ١٩٣١

احدى بنايات المدرسة

المطبعة الادبية — بيروت ٥ سنة ١٩٣١

"[Mary] succeeded in forming a consultative committee whose task was to secure bigger and better premises for the school to bring in more students. As she was working towards that aim, the Allied Forces occupied Lebanon, and the Committee of Syrian English Schools arrived to Beirut. When they heard about al-'Ahliyya Syrian School and its modern educational services, they gave its director permission to use the premises of the English School. Mary accepted the offer with thanks. The following year, the number of students rose to 140 boys and girls."

(Zakka, 1949, p. 38)

In 1919, the school's name was changed to al-*Madrasa al-Sūriyya al-'Ahliyya*. That same year, however, the English School reclaimed the building leaving Mary and the Advisory Board in search of a new location. They settled on a building owned by the Scottish missionaries in the Wādī Abū Jamil neighborhood where the school still is today. "The missionaries did not need the building, so an agreement was immediately reached. The building had a fairly big garden that could be used as a playground" (M. Sinno, personal communication, April 14, 2006). Throughout the changes, the school was generously supported by King Faisal of Iraq[1] and Bayard Dodge[2](Khairallah, 1996). Thereafter, the name of the school was changed once more to curb the French authorities' dissatisfaction with the school's adamancy in instilling in its students patriotism and devotion to the Arab cause. It became *Madrasat al-Banāt al-'Ahliyya*.

A NATIONAL SCHOOL PAR EXCELLENCE

By the mid-1920s, the French authorities decided to close al-'Ahliyya School because of its bold resistance to the Mandate. Consequently, Mary, who was adamant about fulfilling her mission, called the students and well-known figures to march in scout formation, like soldiers, to the Grand Serail. All those who were marching raised their voices very high, including May Ziadeh,[3] Julia Tu'mah Dimashqiyah,[4] Salma Sayegh,[5] Mary Yanni,[6] and Mary Ajami,[7] to protest the closure of the school. Also, flying visits were made by Emilie Sursock,[8] Nazira Jumblatt,[9] Anbara Salam Khalidi,[10] Ibtihaj Qaddura,[11] and others (Khairallah, 1996, p. 239). Anissa Najjar[12] reports that:

"When Ponsot,[13] a Protestant French authority, came to Lebanon, a group of al-'Ahliyya girls went to the Port to welcome him and they offered him roses along with a letter asking him to reopen the school. He met Kassab and she explained to him what had happened. Shortly after this meeting, the school reopened and subsequently, the French authorities offered to teach the French language for free. The two instructors in charge of doing it referred to the school as L'Ecole ménagère. Yet, Ms. Kassab did not rebuff the label. All that mattered to her was to keep the school running."

(personal communication
April 26, 2006)

THE SCHOOL'S MOTTO AND IMPACT ON STUDENTS

"Al-'Ahliyya was a national, non-sectarian school. Its main objective was to enlighten the mind, to teach reverence, self-respect, and self-dependence using the most modern educational techniques."

(M. Sinno, personal communication, April 14, 2006)

The motto of the school, *al-ʿIlmu Nūrun wa Hudā,* reflected these ideals and had a special significance for Mary since two of her most favorite cousins were named Nur and Huda. Anissa recalls,

"The motto was hoisted on a green flag. Every time we did something wrong, the motto would be hoisted on a yellow flag in order to mark our wrong behavior. The school was like a home for all of us"

(Personal communication, April 26, 2006).

Moreover, the founding of the school had a revolutionary impact at a time when few Arab women had access to educational opportunities. Mira states that:

"Students who graduated from al-'Ahliyya were automatically accepted in colleges without having to sit for entrance exams because of the institution's high standards of education. It is worth noting that at the time, there were no universities only colleges, and the graduates from the school were easily accepted in them... When my aunt was Principal, the school was very renowned."

(Personal communication, April 14, 2006)

In addition to being an outstanding educator, Mary as mentioned earlier, is also known as one of the founders of the Scout Troop for Girls in Lebanon, along with her best friends, Alice Abcarious and Mary Allam. They used to organize trips to Palestine, Syria, and Egypt (M. Sinno, personal communication, April 14, 2006).

MARY'S QUEST FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Paying the school's debts was Mary's major worry during her tenure as Principal. Representatives of the school visited Egypt, Brazil, and the United States (U.S.) to promote the institution and secure financial support from advocates of education. During the early 1930s, Mary traveled to Canada and the U.S. to raise funds since many people belonging to the Lebanese and Syrian communities there supported the school despite the global economic crisis. Subsequently, a Committee of Supporters and Friends was formed in New York whose officers included Professor Philip Hitti,[14] Nassib Traboulsi, and Fayad Jbara. Regular radio broadcasts of the Committee and ceaseless help from the Arabic-language press in the U.S. led to generous financial support from the communities in North America amounting to a total of 7,160 dollars with around 205 foreigner donors (*Madrasat al-banāt al-ʾAhliyya,* n.d.).

Throughout her quest, Mary also visited many educational institutions, namely Vassar College in New York, Michigan University, the faculty of Dana Hall Junior in Boston, and the faculty of Merle in Detroit which granted a full scholarship to one of *al-ʾAhliyya School* graduates.

FROM FULL-TIME EDUCATOR TO WIFE

While in the U.S., Mary met her future husband Georges Kassab, a distant relative and a wealthy man living in Le Puy, France. According to Anissa, Mary and Georges had known each other for a long time before they got married. She explained:

"Georges Kassab, her relative from Damascus... used to love her when she was young. Her father did not agree to have her marry him since he was very poor, while they were well off. She always loved Georges, and he loved her in return. So, she refused all wedding proposals and remained faithful to him... The year I graduated from school, she went with Nur and Huda to Paris, and they visited Georges. He organized a big reception in their honor. Prior to this meeting, he had offered the school's principal a small bus and a car. She was so touched by his charm and generosity that she decided to return to France to marry him."

(personal communication, April 26, 2006)

Following this trip, Mary returned to Lebanon and declared her decision to resign after 14 consecutive years of service as Principal of the *al-ʾAhliyya* School. Mira recounted:

> *"Everybody was shocked and nobody could understand why. To this day no one understands why she behaved like this. Aunt Mary handed in her resignation to the surprise and disappointment of many of her friends. This was just before the Second World War. She got married in England. A grand banquet was held at the Savoy Hotel. Many family members and friends from Canada, the U.S., France, and Beirut attended the wedding."*
>
> (personal communication April 14, 2006)

Mary entrusted the administration of *al-ʾAhliyya* to her sister, Adèle Kassab, who ran the school in partnership with Wadad Makdisi Cortas.[15] She never returned to Lebanon following her marriage, spending more than 40 years in the United Kingdom (UK). From afar, she always followed the news of her cherished school through correspondence with Wadad (M. Sinno, personal communication, April 2006 ,14).

Throughout her marriage, Mary never had children of her own. When her husband passed away, she mourned him for a long time, barely leaving the house and eventually moving from their big mansion to a smaller house. She passed away on April 1975 ,15, and was buried next to her family in Lebanon as she had requested. Unfortunately, her memorial service that had been planned in June of that year was canceled due to the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War (M. Sinno, personal communication, April 2006 ,14). Years later, Mary's memory as an educator still lives.

Najjar commenting on Mary's qualities as a teacher, *"Mary was good at fundraising. At the school she used to tell us, 'Do unto others what you want others to do unto you.' She had a very sharp eye. She used to scold us while speaking. She was very firm, yet at the same time, when we did something good, she used to praise us instantly. She gave us credit when we deserved it... She was sweet and small, and she used to talk to us with a low voice, without yelling. Yet, she was very practical... She was very fond of children."*

(personal communication, April 26, 2006)

NOTES

1 King Faisal of Iraq (1885-1933) was the third son of Hussein Bin Ali. He helped set up an Arab government in Syria and ruled it from March 1920 until he was expelled by the French in July 1920.

2 Bayard Dodge (1888–1972) was the president of the American University of Beirut (AUB).

3 May Ziadeh (1886-1941) was a Palestinian-Lebanese writer, poet, and a pioneer of the feminist awakening in the Arab region.

4 Julia Tu'mah Dimashqiyah (1954-1882) was a Lebanese educator and journalist.

5 Salma Sayegh (1889–1953) was a Lebanese writer and feminist activist.

6 Mary Yanni (1895-1975) was a Lebanese-Syrian writer and the founder of Minerva, a local magazine.

7 Mary Ajami (1888-1965) was a Syrian poet and feminist writer.

8 Emilie Sursock (1858-1947) was one of the Lebanese founders of Zahrat al-Iḥsān school in Beirut.

9 Nazira Jumblatt (1890-1951) was a prominent Lebanese politician.

10 Anbara Salam Khalidi (1897-1986) was a Lebanese feminist, translator, and writer.

11 Ibtihaj Qaddura (1893–1967) was a Lebanese feminist and political activist.

12 Anissa Najjar (1913–2016) was a Lebanese women's rights activist.

13 Auguste Henri Ponsot (1877–1963) was a French statesman, politician, and the French High Commissioner in Lebanon and Syria, serving from 1926 to 1933.

14 Philip Hitti (1886–1978) was a Lebanese-American professor, scholar, and president of *al-ʾAhliyya School's* Committee of Supporters and Friends in New York.

15 Wadad Makdisi Cortas (1909-1979) was a Palestinian-Lebanese writer and educator.

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RIDA JUREIDINI

(1900 – 1965)

Rida Jureidini belonged to a generation of Lebanese pioneer women who contributed to al-Nahḍa al-Nisāʾiyya in the Arab world during the first half of the 20th century. As an educator, she supported the movement through her devotion to writing and philanthropic work.

FAMILY AND EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Born in 1900, Rida Jureidini was raised in a religious Christian family in Beirut that was affiliated with the Evangelical Church. Rida's father, Yaaqub Jureidini, was a pastor in the Presbyterian Church; he served in Tripoli, Lebanon and Latakia, Syria (Van Saane, 2006, p. 76). Because of her father's work the family resided in Tartous, Syria before moving to Shwayfāt, Lebanon (Van Saane, 2006). Taking after Yaaqub, Adèle, Rida's sister, turned religious and received her certificate of ordination after returning from the United States (U.S.) and became Minister. On the other hand, Rida dedicated her life to education. She graduated from the American School for Girls (ASG), which is currently the Lebanese American University (LAU).

المدرسة الاميركانية للبنات في بيروت

شهادة شرف

يا ان رضى جريديني قد حصلت درجة

عالية في مباحث دروس السنة الرابعة من القسم العلمي

لذلك اعطيت هذه الشهادة في اول تموز ١٩١٣

رئيسة المدرسة

Rachel E. Wallace

PROFESSIONAL JOURNEY

Following her graduation from ASG, Rida was hired to teach there. According to Raja Hajjar, her nephew, Rida spent around 30 years teaching at ASG, before changing schools (personal communication, July 21, 2002). Her contributions over the years were appreciated and she was awarded the Order of Merit. She also received a personal letter from Claire Baily that stated:

Sept 23, 1949

Dear Miss Jureidini:

I have been authorized by the Mission to offer you this gift in appreciation of your many years of loving and serious devotion to ASG. You have given much in every way and it is deeply appreciated.

It is difficult, I know, for you as you carry out your own plans. But I feel that you will still be promoting those same ideals of life and conduct in the Ras Beirut school as here at ASG. Your leaving us is a heavy loss – no doubt about it, but we are still co-laborers, are we not?

May God bless you in your venture!

Cordially and affectionately yours,

Ms. Claire Bailey

[Verbatim copy of original text]

In 1961, Rida was invited as guest of honor for the ASG's 25th anniversary. Her speech, part of which is shared below, described the sorrow that embraced her after leaving her alma mater:

"Have I bored you with all I have mentioned of past history? I am sorry, but I am not through yet. You know I was chosen to speak at this occasion for the reason that I lived in A.S.G the longest of anyone present here – not less than 30 years as pupil and teacher! Can any of you beat it? So, allow me one minute for each year at least. I was part of the school, and the school part of me so much that when in 1949 I decided, after months of prayer and consideration, to take up the work that I am doing now in Rās Beirut, I could not believe myself nor could my friends believe it. It cost me, I confess to you, many, many tears. But there was no getting away from it; I felt the call to the new place... but I have not regretted the step and the most difficult part of it was to disclose my decision to Miss Bailey. I'll tell you a silly thing I did in this connection. I kept my key to the front door long after taking myself and my things out of the school because I wanted to feel I still belonged there, and when at long last I gave up the key, it was not easy. From then on, I had to ring the doorbell and go in as a guest and caller. But the friendships formed still stand and nothing will change them."

(Jureidini, 1961, p. 2)

The speech is equally noteworthy as Rida highlighted the school's impact:

"Hundreds of young women have gone out from this school who have been distinguished leaders in the whole Arab world. Into Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Palestine, the Sudan, Iraq. The girls who came to A. S. G. acquired and carried back what has helped them raise the standards of living in their various communities. It was likewise the graduates of A. S.G. who were the first to take up professions that had been theretofore exclusive to men, besides hosts of teachers who were pioneers in the countries mentioned before and who opened the way for work to many others."

(Jureidini, 1961, p. 2)

In 1949, Rida left ASG to become Principal of the National Evangelical School of Ras Beirut, which was previously headed by Aminah Khoury Makdisi.[1] Year after year, she added classes to the school until it became a full-fledged high school.

A TALENTED WRITER AND PHILANTHROPIST

Both Rida and her sister Adèle were articulate and talented writers; the sisters would regularly work on publishing their opinions on sociopolitical topics. Between 1911 and her death in 1965, Rida published around six articles on fictional, sentimental, and analytical genres in local journals such as *al-Ḥasnāʾ* and *Ṣawt al-Marʾa*. Generally, she advocated for women's rights and declared that the "most remarkable and standout chapter in the history of human civilization over the past four centuries is the story of women's progress" (*Ṣawt al-Marʾa,* 1948, p. 27). In her articles and speeches, she discussed issues related to the status of women, the role of education in the lives of students, and the ideal interaction between educators and parents. When asked about his aunt's academic involvement and overall impact, Raja states that:

In light of this project, Rida explained the necessity of promoting literacy among all individuals, especially adults and women, for the liberation and national renaissance in the Arab world. Moreover, she believed in the importance of collective efforts; she suggested that if each one took it upon themselves to teach at least one person from their neighborhood, Lebanon would be on the right track toward eradicating illiteracy. Following in Rida's footsteps, her students took the initiative to teach night classes once a week to adults in the community.

Rida died in 1965 from breast cancer, leaving behind a legacy of love and dedication. Those who remember her today attest to her profound nature and eagerness to achieve her goals.

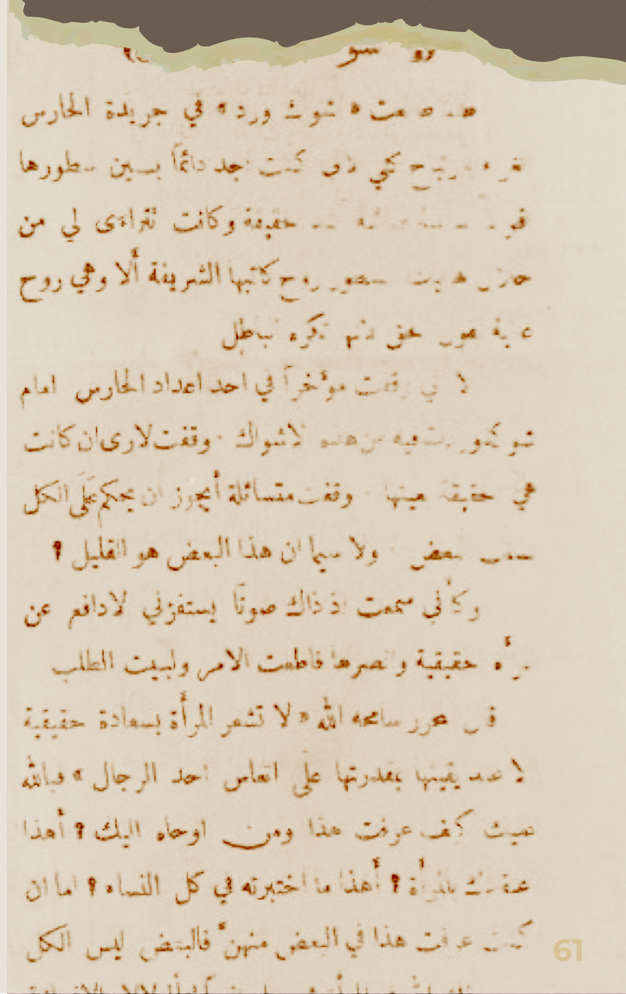
Raja underscored that Rida was his favorite aunt:

"When I grew up and started traveling, everybody associated me with my aunt. I never tired of being asked: Is Rida Jureidini your aunt?"

(R. Hajjar, personal communication, July 21, 2002)

"In addition to her full-time job at the school, her involvement in the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), and writing articles, Rida was involved in projects that strove to eradicate illiteracy among adults, specifically women. Due to this interest, she helped Frank Laubach[2] in his journey to the Middle East to advocate for eradicating illiteracy as a key step toward genuine development. She translated his speeches and lectures and gave lectures herself."

(R. Hajjar, personal communication, July 21, 2002)



NOTES

1 Aminah Khoury Makdisi (1876-1951) was a Lebanese educator, writer, philanthropist, and founder of *Mawrid al-Aḥdāth* magazine.

2 Frank Laubach (1884-1970) was an American Congregational Christian missionary who developed the Each One Teach One literary program.

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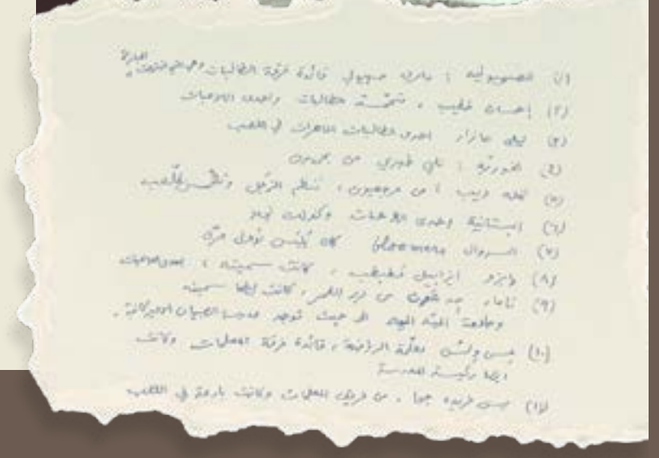
ROSE GHURAYYIB

(1909-2006)

Between Lebanon and Iraq, Rose Ghurayyib took the lead in women's education and journalism. For a long period, she distinguishably served as a role model for young girls and women.

EARLY LIFE

Born in 1909 in Dāmūr, Lebanon, Rose Ghurayyib was the only girl in a family of five. Rose believed in the importance of education and was supported in her pursuits by her two brothers, Michel and Antoine Ghurayyib. Her parents, however, opposed her decision to leave for Beirut in 1930 for higher education; they feared that higher education might hinder her chances of marriage. She succeeded, however, in convincing them that education was no less important than marriage.



A PROMINENT EDUCATOR AND A PIONEER IN CRITICAL AND CREATIVE WRITING

Rose's passion for education was expressed in her handwritten, undated, and unpublished short autobiography, where she revealed that her personality was shaped by her parents, the schools she attended, and her life in Beirut where she studied and taught. She received her elementary education at *Madrasat Rāhibāt al-Dāmūr*, and then she moved to the American School of Sidon.

Rose's career as an educator started in 1927 when she established and headed Madrasat *al-Dāmūr al-Ibtidāʾiyya*. Yet, she soon gave up on this position and moved back to Beirut where she sought to further develop her educational ambitions (Narallah, 2001). In fall of 1931, she registered at the American Junior College for Women (AJCW), which is currently the Lebanese American University (LAU), as a sophomore after being exempted from her freshman year for graduating high school with honors, alongside having five years of teaching experience. In that year, she moved on to teach at the American School of Sidon.

In June 1932, she graduated with an associate in arts degree and received the Scholarship Cup, the highest academic record of the year, and the Torch, the highest award bestowed on the ideal college student. This degree allowed her to pursue her higher education at the American University of Beirut (AUB), graduating in 1934 with a Bachelor of Arts in Arabic Literature with distinction. Her professors advised her to specialize further in Arabic literature and in 1945 she secured a master's degree in the field.

In 1937, Rose was invited by the Iraqi Ministry of Education to go and teach in Mosul's Secondary School for Girls. Impressed by the country's educational re-awakening especially in the field of women's education, Rose accepted the offer and became a pioneer of women's education in Iraq alongside her friends Anissa Najjar, Najla Akrawi, and Salwa Nassar. Rose recounted that the Iraqi government recruited young women graduates from Lebanon to teach at the public schools; the educators rented houses and lived together – Rose lived with her friends Anissa Najjar and Linda Karam, who were called *Sayyidāt al-shabqah,* meaning "ladies of the hat," as they wore hats while Iraqi women did not.

With time, Rose and her peers became role models for the young women in Mosul; their progressive teaching style and their engagement with the Iraqi community through theater and music allowed their pupils to connect with them and appreciate their efforts. Additionally, the educators published a school magazine *Banāt ʿAddād* and spent their time on creative work turning the school into a cultural center. Their students also became known as high achievers in the official exams.

In 1941, Rose returned to Lebanon and was appointed head of the Arabic department at the AJCW. In 1945, she moved to the *Collège Protestant Français (CPF)* to teach Arabic and remained there until 1955. Throughout her time at CPF, she focused on creative writing and literary research. As of 1947, she contributed to every issue of the monthly women's magazine *Ṣawt al-Marʾa.* In her articles, although she cherished several Western values, she criticized the prevailing tendency among Lebanese thinkers and educators to imitate the West while ignoring their own culture, traditions, and language.

In 1956, she returned to the Beirut College for Women (BCW), which is currently the Lebanese American University (LAU), as a professor in the Arabic department. Despite her increased responsibilities, she did not stop contributing to Ṣawt al-Marʾa until it closed down in 1958. When asked whether she was paid for her contributions, Rose answered, "I never got a penny for this work. My aim was to master writing, speak what is on my mind, and call for change" (personal communication, August 30, 2000).

In 1973, upon the establishment of the Institute for Women's Studies in The Arab World (IWSAW), along with her teaching responsibilities, she became the first editor of the Institute's quarterly journal *Al-Raida,* in Arabic and English holding the position until 1983. For many years to follow, and until she passed away, she remained an active contributor, consultant, and researcher for *Al-Raida*.

A LOVE FOR FOLKLORE AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Rose loved her mother tongue, the Arabic language, and worked hard to make this language appreciated and loved by her students. For that purpose, she published many reading and grammar books for the elementary level. Moreover, her love for folklore and children's literature has marked her as a pioneer in writing for children. She left behind a rich collection of stories, poetry, music books, and plays. This collection consists of more than 70 books.

Rose passed away on January 11, 2006, after moving to her final refuge, the Convent of *Yasūʿ al-Malak*. She was an inspiration to those who knew her or worked with her. Najla Akrawi sums up Rose's qualities as "an absolute honesty that knew no compromise, great modesty to the extent of self-effacement, a brilliant and universal mind that harvested all the scholarly rewards without any trace of self-consciousness or pride" (Sabri, 1967, p. 71).

HONORING AND RECOGNITION

Rose was awarded the Medal of the Association of University Graduates in Lebanon in 1968, the Cedar Order in 1971, and the Gold Medal of Education in 1980.

"When asked to recall her trips to Iraq between 1937 and 1941, Rose explained that she and her colleagues used to travel through Aleppo to Mosul using the Automotive railway (a now defunct coastal railway that connected Lebanon to many Arab countries). In one instance, Rose revealed that she had to travel by herself and stay overnight in a hotel in Damascus. At the time, it was unacceptable for women to travel unaccompanied, let alone spend a night in a hotel. The fear of being assaulted kept Rose up all that night."

(R. Ghurayyib, personal communication, October 30, 2000)

Although Rose faced difficult situations in her lifetime, her strong will and passion for writing helped her to overcome them. In 1976, she was displaced from *Dāmūr* due to the merciless civil war in Lebanon; she lost her house, village, and all her literary works and manuscripts. She faced this cruel situation stoically, considering that she could rewrite all what was lost and destroyed.

(Nasrallah, 2006)

NOTES

1 Anissa Najjar (1913–2016) was a Lebanese women's rights activist.

2 Najla Akrawi (date unknown) was a Lebanese writer and President of Beirut University College (BUC) alumni

3 Salwa Nassar (1913-1967) was the first Lebanese woman physicist and former president of the Lebanese American University (LAU).

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SALWA NASSAR

(1913 – 1967)

Nestled amidst the pine forests of Ḍhūr al-Shwair in the Matn mountains, the Nassar family saw the birth and rise of one of the world's earliest women nuclear physicists and a fervent advocate for education.

BACKGROUND AND EDUCATION

Born in 1913, Salwa Nassar was raised in a modest family in Ḍhūr al-Shwair, Lebanon. Her father Chukri Nassar was a barber, and her mother was a housewife. Salwa had three sisters, as well as a brother and sister from her mother's first marriage. Until the age of 17, she remained in her native village, attending Shwair High School where she was known as the school mathematician. The school principal, Mr. Fares Badre, was impressed by Salwa and urged her parents to send her to Brummana High School (BHS) to finish her secondary education. Her father insisted that Salwa pursue her education and saved 20 gold pounds to pay for her education.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS

After graduating from BHS, Salwa received a scholarship from the American Junior College (AJC), which is currently the Lebanese American University (LAU), from which she got her first Associate of Arts degree. She then became the only female student from her class to be accepted at the American University of Beirut (AUB) to pursue a bachelor's in mathematics and a minor in physics. In 1925, there were only seven women students at AUB. Throughout her time at AUB, Salwa boarded at AJC and worked as a student tutor and a researcher at the chemistry laboratory to earn her pocket money.

In 1935, Salwa graduated with distinction, and as many young women at the time did, left Beirut to teach mathematics and science at Birzeit College in Palestine until 1938. Then, in 1939, she moved to Iraq to teach science at Mosul Secondary School until 1940. Over almost four years, Salwa financially supported her two younger sisters in getting their education at the American High School for Girls in Sidon.

Later on, Salwa studied at Smith College, Massachusetts, where she obtained her master's degree. She then moved to the University of California Berkley to pursue her Ph.D. (Akrawi, 1967). During that period, Salwa was fascinated by nuclear and atomic physics, particularly cosmic rays. She was one of several young women who were intellectually driven: she particularly excelled in sciences and math (Fleishmann, 2009).

The title of her Ph.D. dissertation was "A Cloud Chamber Study of Cascade Showers and Knock-on Electrons in Lead," and she was the eighth woman to receive a Ph.D. degree from the Physics department at the University of California, Berkeley.

A FERVENT EDUCATOR

Following her studies, Salwa was offered a teaching position in physics at the naval training program; she declined it and chose to return to Lebanon instead. This choice stemmed from a deep-rooted attachment to her family and homeland. An anecdote recounted by Marcelle Nassar translates how she disregarded her many titles, but never her origins:

"I went to the printers', as she had asked me to make her business cards. But when I got there, the printer asked me: What do you want to put on them, Academic, Doctor, President? So, I called her, and she told me that all she wanted was her name, Salwa Nassar. She insisted on having her father's name as she was proud of him; he was not a deputy or anything like that, just a simple barber, but he did everything he could to offer his daughter an education."

(personal communication, October 25, 2001)

Upon her return in 1945, Salwa joined the faculty of AJC, renamed Beirut College for Women (BCW). During the first three years, she put all her efforts into founding the science department, introducing physics to the curriculum, and equipping an updated laboratory for science classes while also teaching mathematics and history. Additionally, Salwa presided over the Alumni Association. Some of her achievements included the first fruit and vegetable canning project, the financial campaign for the construction of Irwin Hall, as well as a nuclear physics seminar for faculty and students at the BCW and AUB.

In 1950, she joined the faculty of AUB, where she taught physics before founding the department, and became the first female chairman of a department at the university. Her continuous efforts, wide contacts, and force of persuasion convinced the university administration and other American institutions to better equip the department and recruit scientists. She also founded a centre for nuclear physics which was the first of its kind in the region.

FOUNDER OF LEBANON'S FIRST SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH INSTITUTION

Aside from her academic pursuits at the university level, Salwa was also one of the first persons to request the establishment of a national centre for scientific research in 1955. After years of relentless lobbying, the Lebanese government accepted the idea, and the Lebanese National Council for Scientific Research was founded in 1962. It was allotted one percent of the national budget, and its council has rendered invaluable services to Lebanon in the field of scientific research.

In 1966, Salwa was appointed the first Lebanese president of the BCW (Akrawi, 1967) only to pass away one year later from Hodgkin's disease that developed into Leukemia. During that year, however, she managed to introduce the "History of Lebanon" as a subject into the curriculum.

Throughout her career, Salwa attended many conferences abroad and represented Lebanon twice at the Atomic Conference for Peace in Geneva. She was an active member in many organizations including the Phi Beta Kappa and the American Physics Society, and one of the few Arab-speaking scientists to specialize in atomic physics. Her name appeared in the *Who's Who in Atoms* in 1960. She received many decorations, including the Order of Lebanese University Women Graduates, the Lebanese Golden Order of Merit, and the Lebanese National Order of the Cedars. Mikhail Naimy[1] maintains that "her love for Lebanon was unparalleled, matched only by her love for goodness and devotion to God. Her presence among us [in the United States] was a blessing and a source of goodness for us and for Lebanon" (Akrawi, 1997, p. 166). Salwa was also a fervent believer in women's rights; she wrote about the reasons that limit the access of women to the field of physical sciences, particularly in Lebanon (Nassar, 1948).

In only a short life span, Salwa became the socially and academically active Dr. Nassar, who chose to give up on positions in the most prestigious American institutions and returned to Lebanon where she accumulated a plethora of achievements in the fields of academic research and education.

In appreciation of her devoted work at BCW, the senior class of 1967 and the student body initiated a fund to endow scholarships to assist competent students in need of financial support. In recognition of the moral and financial support which Nassar offered in establishing the library in the Health Center of the Women's Association for Educational Aid, the Association in Ḍhūr al-Shwair decided to name the library after her.

In a letter to Charles Malik[2], Salwa explained: *"The nation, like an individual, asserts and affirms itself through its productive activity in the fields of knowledge. These qualities are essential for any healthy nation that wants to maintain its dignity and independence."*

(Nassar, 1958, p. 5)

"[While abroad], the first thing that caught my attention upon arrival was the speed and efficiency of the work, its comprehensiveness and utility, and the abundance of women involved."

(Nassar, 1946, p. 4)

Salwa was *"a physicist by mind and a Lebanese at heart."*

(Samara, 1967, p. 4)

NOTES

1 Mikhail Naimy (1889-1988) was a notable Lebanese writer and thinker.

2 Charles Malik (1906–1987) was a Lebanese academic, diplomat, philosopher, politician, and former president of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

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WADAD MAKDISI CORTAS

(1909-1979)

Wadad Makdisi Cortas was a pioneering educator and a firm believer in her Arab heritage and language. She dedicated her entire life to enlightening and empowering generations.

CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION

Born in 1909, Wadad Makdisi Cortas was raised in a secular family devoted to education. Her father, Jirjis Makdisi, was a distinguished educator who taught at the Syrian Protestant College, which is currently the American University of Beirut (AUB). He raised his children to be free and responsible, proud of their Arab and Lebanese heritage, tolerant, and respectful to others. Most of Wadad's memories of her father are about his deep appreciation of knowledge and their outings, long walks, and the summer vacations they spent together in Sūq al-Gharb, Kūra and Ḍhūr al-Shwair. As for her mother, like most women of her time, she was a devoted housewife. In her autobiography, *Dhikrayāt 1917-1977*, Wadad remembers:

"My mother gave exclusive attention to her home and family. I [also] recall how much she cared for her neighbors. She knew them one by one and attended to their needs to the best of her capacity. She gave them clothes, food and attended to their healthcare."

(Cortas, 1982, p. 35)

Several figures have also left an impact on Wadad's life; family, friends, and acquaintances such as William Van Dych and Harvey Porter appear to have impressed her growing up. One woman who seemed to have left her most in awe would be May Daher about whom she wrote:

"All the young men wanted to ask her hand... deep down inside I wished so much to meet her and touch her hand. One day, my uncle took me by the hand to greet her. Her smile filled me with so much joy... I felt the glittering in her eyes penetrate my heart. I remember her saying a few words to me that I do not recall, but I know that their effect remained with me for long years of my life."

(Cortas, 1982, p. 30)

"Like most of her contemporaries, Wadad attended the American School for Girls, which is currently the Lebanese American University (LAU), where most of the Protestant community of Beirut sent their children. Yet, the young girl's inclination toward being religious and conservative worried her father and made him move her at the age of ten to the al-'Ahliyya School for Girls (known previously as the School of Mary Kassab), the first national secular school in Lebanon and the Middle East. After all, according to her daughter, Mariam Cortas, Wadad's father did not wish to see his daughter become a missionary."

(personal communication, July 9, 2001)

Unfortunately, however, Wadad's childhood was not always ideal. When she was 12 years old, a number of French soldiers invaded the al-'Ahliyya School for Girls and terrorized the administration and teachers. In her memoirs she stated, "I can still remember very clearly how the face of the Director got gloomy, and her eyes filled with tears as she announced, "The French authority has ordered the interruption of studies as of tomorrow" (Cortas, 1982, p. 47). The traumatizing incident led to the school shutting its doors for 20 days after which they were opened only to stop media pressure.

A COURAGEOUS STREAK

At the age of 17, Wadad joined the American Junior College for Women (AJCW), which is currently the Lebanese American University (LAU), and then transferred to AUB — an uncommon decision for girls her age during that time:

"I was the only one from my class who pursued a higher education. The rest of the girls stayed home and waited to be wed, which made me very sad. I used to think that marriage and pursuing education were not incompatible. I owe this thinking and approach to life to my father, Jirjis Makdisi, who taught me the meaning of life and the importance of education for women."

(Daher, 1974, p. 3)

In 1930, Wadad graduated from AUB with a B.A. degree in History. She slowly began to realize how imperative it is for women to play an active role in public life (Sudqi, 1951). Throughout her time as an undergrad, she participated in political events on campus. Some of her most notable moments were challenging a prominent Lebanese authority figure, as well as her public opposition to the French Mandate in a speech she gave in front of students and faculty. Despite her tendency to speak up on national struggles, Wadad was a shy and reserved woman at heart; her daughter, Mariam notes:

"She was insecure... She never went herself to any store to buy anything... It was always my aunt Salma who bought her all that she needed from clothes to all sorts of other things. My aunt (sometimes my grandfather) also paid for the taxi because she could not do it... She hated everything that had to do with money."

(M. Cortas, personal communication, July 9, 2001)

CAREER PATH

After graduating from AUB, Wadad followed her sister Salma Makdisi to Baghdad, Iraq, and held a teaching position there. In fact, after the country's independence from the British mandate, there was a pressing need to spread education in the shortest time possible. Unlike her colleagues, Wadad, spent only a year in Iraq before leaving to the United States (U.S.) to pursue her higher education. Three years later in 1933, she graduated from the University of Michigan with an M.A. in Literature (Nasrallah, 2001). Wadad then fulfilled her Ph.D. requirements and moved back to Lebanon intending to spend a year before finalizing her dissertation and marrying her American fiancé. The latter plan, however, was put aside when she was offered the position of Director of the *al-ʾAhliyya* School for Girls where she had once been a student. Believing that she had a more pertinent role to play in her native land, Wadad stayed in Lebanon and for approximately 40 years devoted her time to the school.

At her school, Wadad emphasized Arabic as the primary language and English as the second. Wadad and her co-director Mary Kassab's decisions to refuse the adoption of French as a teaching language and to hoist the mandate's flag on the school's roof were two main reasons that made the school an object of anger for the French authorities. Along with emphasis on the Arabic language, May Daher states that Wadad introduced routine practices at the school that included activities of the following order:

> *"On every national event I used to gather the students and rationally explain to them what was happening. Those meetings were followed by fundraising campaigns, providing different kinds of social services, and sending supporting messages. The most important instance of this type was in 1967. Due to the girls' enthusiasm and compassion, the school was chosen as the locale for the Friends of Jerusalem Association."*
>
> (Daher, 1974, p. 3)

This sheds light on the behavior of her students during the battle for independence. Girls of the *al-ʾAhliyya* School for Girls went on a strike and the school closed for ten days. On Independence Day, Wadad's students were among the first to hoist the Lebanese flag on buildings.

> *"According to Nasrallah (2001), Wadad stressed that one of the most important components of girls' education is learning to have confidence. Her distinctive conceptualization and approach to education equally entailed the enforcement of a supportive role of faculty and administration. She also made sure that teachers and staff were always supportive to students, insisting it is the school's duty to equip the girls with primary skills that would enable them to enter the employment market with confidence. Wadad asserted, 'I used to ask each of my students what she intended to do after graduating. I used to feel troubled when they answered: 'nothing'."*
>
> (Daher, 1974, p. 3)

Additionally, Wadad allowed girls from public schools to pursue their secondary level education for free, at the risk of making the aristocratic class angry. She also never hesitated to provide free education for children whose parents had financial difficulties and could not pay their tuition. Notably, Wadad's most intensive and unrelenting efforts were dedicated to Palestinian students who were forced to seek refuge in Lebanon following their exile from Palestine in 1948. Daher (1974) recalls Wadad's words:

> *"I had developed a special kind of sensitivity to the Palestinian problem since I was 11 years old. Around that age I sent a letter to the King of Britain, George V, expressing my resentment at the partitioning decision. I was very touched by the 1948 disaster. I welcomed a big number of Palestinian girls who were separated from their parents, especially since before 1948, Palestinians were more generous than the Lebanese when it came to providing financial support to the school."*
>
> (p. 3)

Moreover, Wadad's educational approach set itself apart from other traditional ones, given the incredible efforts she dedicated to developing children's artistic skills, namely their appreciation of music. Every morning, students gathered in the court to sing different tunes and rhymes in English and Arabic, while she played the piano. Later, however, when Wadad started to implement her scheme to nurture tolerance, acceptance of others and pride in Arab descent among students, all the singing was done in Arabic.

The school's choir received several invitations to perform in other countries. Its first undertaking of this kind was to the Holy Land prior to 1948, followed by two other equally successful performances, in Turkey and Egypt. Mariam recalled that the trip to Egypt was the first after 1953, i.e., when women obtained the right to vote in Lebanon. Even so, as she narrated, when Wadad finished processing the passports for all choir members based on written approvals from their parents, the public security officer asked for her husband's approval; she retaliated highlighting the irony behind the situation whereby she was trusted to sign for thirty young girls but not for herself as a 40-year-old woman. Despite her relentless attempts, Wadad still had to get her husband's written permission to go on the trip. Mariam stressed that *"this incident deeply marked my mother. She could never get over it. She never forgot it."*

(personal communication, July 9, 2001)

Another cultural activity that Wadad introduced was a series of lectures by prominent social, educational, and political figures during social assemblies that took place at *Dār al-Ijtimāʿ*. Everybody in the school, including administrative staff, attended and students were given the opportunity to freely express their ideas to train the girls not to be afraid to voice their thoughts. Indian Prime Minister Nihru Jawaharlal's sister and Helen Keller were among the guests. Unfortunately, however, these activities were canceled to focus on the Baccalaureate system imposed by the government, which Wadad vehemently opposed since she considered that official exams classify students (Daher, 1974). Elaborating on this point, Wadad's son, Sami Cortas, explained:

"My mother did not label people. She never said this one is stupid, this one is intelligent, this one is studious, and this one is lazy. She believed each one had a talent, and her concern was to bring out the best in her students. For her, grades were not the most important thing. In her opinion, education entailed the development of healthy personalities through activities of different sorts."

(S. Cortas, personal communication, July 18, 2001)

Mariam also stressed that when a student was better at art, Wadad encouraged her, saying, "There is nothing wrong or shameful with that. If she wants to do art, let her" (personal communication, July 9, 2001). If a student was good at music or singing, she encouraged and helped her to perfect her skills. When the Baccalaureate exam became tough and less people were able to pass it, Wadad introduced the British high school system (the A and O levels) along with the Lebanese curriculum, giving students the choice to join either one depending on their capacities and future plans. By 1959, many girls from Iraq had joined the new system. Graduates of the school became prominent women with distinguished talents, illustrating the effectiveness of Wadad's revolutionary educational approach.

Alongside the educational aid she offered, Wadad made it her mission to help those in need. For instance, she voiced her concerns on institutions that serviced disabled people such as hospitals and schools. To young adults, she also offered employment and/or shelter at the school when they could not financially tend to themselves. Emily Nasrallah was among said beneficiaries; Wadad provided the Lebanese writer with shelter and a position as an Arabic teacher after she left her village in the South to work in Beirut. Along with her commitment to helping and supporting others, Wadad was a trusting person, Sami recalled:

"Shortly after joining al-'Ahliyya school, Emily Nasrallah told my mom that she was embarrassed because she had to go out that evening and stay out late. My mom, very simply, gave her the keys to the building and told her to make sure she locked the door well, and asked her to return the keys the following day. Emily talks about this incident and how she was a girl alone, having recently moved from the village, and how surprised she was to find someone who trusts a girl with the keys to the whole school. Actually, my mom acted likewise with us."

(S. Cortas, personal communication, July 18, 2001)

MOTHERHOOD

In 1940, Wadad married Emile Cortas, with whom she had four children. Her experience with motherhood was marked by an anxious and strict nature as she did not tolerate any form of misbehavior from her children. Yet, she let them play as it pleased them, for she was not fussy about tidiness, but she always insisted that they kept their manners, acted decently, and were courteous to people. Mariam pointed out:

"She became quickly irritated if we did something she did not approve of. It was very stressful for us to abide by some of her rules... to the point that one of my brothers packed up and left for good to the US... he was a bon vivant... His behavior irritated my mother a lot... actually in her writings she used to say I have four children, but she only talked about three of them."

(M. Cortas, personal communication, July 9, 2001)

Wadad fostered the same values in her children that her parents instilled in her – she taught them to be open-minded and responsible human beings, proud of their identity and their heritage. As such, Wadad insisted her family spoke Arabic and would often get irritated when words from different languages were included in their conversations. Over time, the Makdisis became known for advocating the Arabic language throughout personal, professional, and academic conversations.

THE CULMINATION OF ACHIEVEMENTS

In addition to school, Wadad was involved in educational and humanitarian associations. She was a founding member and a treasurer of the Lebanese Academy of Arts (1940-1974) and of the National Council for Secondary Education (1960-1974). She was also on the Board of Trustees of Brummana High School (1950-1962) and the Ladies Guild of the Asfourieh Mental Hospital (1952-1963), as well as a founding member of the Palestinian Studies Foundation (1963-1979), the treasurer of the Friends of the Jerusalem Association, and the President or Secretary of its Women's Committee (1960-1972).

On the eve of the civil war, on June 21, 1974, Wadad retired from her position as Director of the *al-'Ahliyya* School for Girls, as well as from all other positions she had occupied. That same year, she was awarded her third honorary medal, the National Order of the Cedars, as illness gradually took over. Wadad passed away in 1979, irrevocably distressed by the civil war that severely undermined all her socio-political and secular egalitarian ideals and views after spending three weeks in a coma.

During her lifetime, Wadad published three books in Arabic: *Dunyā Aḥbabtuhā* (an autobiography), *Anāshīd al-'Ahliyya* (a book of songs), and *Manāhil al-Makdisi* (an educational storybook). She also wrote and contributed to articles that were published in the feminist journal *Ṣawt al-Mar'a*, revealing Wadad's views about women's education and their role and mission in life. Her second autobiography *Dhikrayāt 1917-1977* was published after her death in 1982. During that same year, in commemoration of her distinguished achievements in the fields of education and social work, the Memorial Committee of Wadad Makdisi Cortas was established and funded by donations and subscriptions. This committee provided scholarships for the disabled, the blind, and students of the *Madrasat al-'Ahliyya*.

(Nuwayhid, 1986)

"Lebanon, a highway between East and West, has been privileged all through its history with the sublime duty of teaching mankind."

(Cortas, 1948, p. 10)

According to Mariam Cortas, *"Wadad never worked for Wadad... She had a mission... Her father sent her to a secular school so that she wouldn't become a missionary, yet she established herself a mission of a different genre."*

(personal communication, July 9, 2001)

NOTES

1 William Van Dych (date unknown) was an American professor of Biology at the American University of Beirut (AUB).

2 Harvey Porter (1845-1923) was an American missionary, scientist, librarian and historian.

3 Mariam Cortas (1985-Present) is a Lebanese-American writer and activist.

4 Mary Kassab (1881-1975) was a Lebanese-Syrian educator.

5 George V (1865-1936) was King of the United Kingdom, the British Dominions, and Emperor of India, reigning from 1910 to 1936.

6 Helen Keller (1880 –1968) was an American writer, lecturer, political activist, and an advocate for the rights of people with disabilities.

7 Emily Nasrallah (1931-2018) was a Lebanese writer and human rights activist.

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POLITICS

EVA MALIK

(1914 – 1988)

An advocate for women's empowerment and a devoted mother and wife, Eva was among the women who led the struggle for independence. She was also an ardent writer, with a record of published articles and studies.

EARLY LIFE

Born in 1914 in al-Kharṭūm, Sudan, Eva was the eldest of Habib Malik and Hanna Badr's four children. Her paternal grandfather was the Pastor Yousef Badr, the first indigenous Protestant pastor in Lebanon and Syria. She spent part of her childhood in Sudan where her father worked as an accountant for the British government and her summer vacations in Lebanon where she and her sister later settled to pursue their education.

Eva's educational journey started at the American School for Girls (ASG); she then moved to the American Junior College for Women (AJCW), which is currently the Lebanese American University (LAU), before graduating from the American University of Beirut (AUB) with a master's degree in Arabic studies. While at AUB, she met Dr. Charles Malik, who was a Professor of Philosophy at the university and married him on June 18, 1941.

A SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ACTIVIST

In 1943, Eva and a group of Lebanese women activists led the women's struggle for independence from the French Mandate. Eva's proficiency in the English language and her acquaintance with Lady Spears were influential factors in shaping the events at the time (H. Malik, personal communication, April 4, 2004).

In 1944, Eva and Dr. Charles had their first and only child, Habib Malik. A year later, in 1945, the couple traveled to Washington where they established the first Lebanese Embassy in the United States (U.S.). Simultaneously, Eva worked to ensure that the Lebanese American community maintained close relations with its homeland.

It was also around that time that Eva collaborated with Shukri Shammas to establish the Rabieh residential project and the Rabieh Garden Club on a hill above Anṭilyās, Mount Lebanon, overlooking the Mediterranean. Eva also founded the Beirut branch of YWCA (Young Women Christian Association) with Adma Bayoud.

In addition to founding associations, Eva published several articles and studies in English and Arabic and delivered speeches on sociopolitical topics. She also left behind some unpublished papers containing personal thoughts and reflections. In all her writings, she embraced a progressive stance on women's empowerment and activism, stating that Lebanese women are resilient and have unequivocally attained remarkable achievements and made valuable contributions over the years (Malik, 1946). According to Eva:

"The Lebanese woman is no less intelligent and capable than her male counterpart, and I genuinely believe that if given the same opportunities, she has the ability to stride alongside men in diverse fields, her head held high with pride..."

(*Ṣawt al-Mar'a*, 1949, p. 11)

A LOVING WIFE AND MOTHER

Eva was known by her friends and society at large for her high moral standards, wisdom and patience, devotion and religious faith, and exemplary role as a wife and mother.

Eva remained steadfast at her husband's side during the successive phases of his political, diplomatic, and academic career. Charles served as Lebanon's first ambassador to US. He was head of Lebanon's delegation to the founding conference of the United Nations (UN) in San Francisco; rapporteur and then President of the UN Human Rights Commission; President of the UN Economic and Social Council; President of the UN General Assembly; Lebanon's Minister of Foreign Affairs and of Education; and member of Lebanon's Parliament. She was also an inspiration to him in his intellectual and cultural achievements (H. Malik, personal communication, April 4, 2004).

Eva passed away on December 4, 1988, eleven months after Charles's death.

"If I were a foreign minister, I'd be [meticulous] in selecting our country's representatives because when political representatives misbehave, they do harm to their country."

(E. Malik, as cited in *Ṣawt al-Mar'a*, 1950, p. 10)

NOTES

1 Charles Malik (1906-1987) was a Lebanese academic, politician, and diplomat.

2 Nancy Maurice (1900-1975) was a British secretary and wife of General Spears.

3 Shukri Shammas (date unknown) was a Lebanese engineer, philanthropist, and co-founder of the Contracting and Trading Group (CAT).

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FATIMA AL-ASSAAD

(1903 – 1978)

Fatima al-Assaad is remembered as one of the most influential political figures in the Jabal ʿĀmil region and the whole of South Lebanon; she was a true leader who challenged all constraints and guided people with much integrity and unwavering resolve.

THE ASSAAD'S FAMILY LEGACY

Born in 1903, Fatima al-Assaad was the eldest of Kamel al-Assaad's and Mariam al-Abdullah's two children. Fatima lost her mother when she was a little girl, and her father never married again. He raised his daughters with the help of women in the family.

Fatima's family governed South Lebanon for an extended period following a glorious victory in the famous battle of ʿAynātā during the 17th century (Hamadeh, 1997-1998). Their hegemony, under the leadership of Nassif al-Nassar in the century after, was acknowledged yet challenged, especially by the Ottomans. Regardless, the family was recognized for its distinct appreciation of education, veneration of religious authorities, social openness, and its women's involvement in public affairs. (Hamadeh, 1997-1998)

THE INFLUENCE OF A STRICT FATHER

As children, Fatima and her sister were raised by a loving yet extremely strict father. When describing her childhood to her granddaughter, Najla Hamadeh, Fatima stated:

"... Nobody saw us [me and my sister]. Nobody heard our voice. If my father ever heard my voice, he would enter the room with sparks coming out of his eyes warning me that nobody ought to hear me, not even the maid, not even the wall, because I am a woman and the daughter of Kamel al-Assad. We never went out or visited anyone, but we were not isolated from the world. Other women's visits were the thin string that connected us to the outside world. Jealousy over us consumed [my father's] heart and mind, so I used to read novels and magazines and anything that would fall into my hand in secret. That is except the Qur'ān, which I knew how to read and explain thanks to a female teacher my dad had brought in specifically to teach me reading and writing through the teachings of the Qur'ān...Political talks would reach me without having asked for it, and it would distract me from the fact that I could not see the sky or breathe fresh air unless I was in the company of my father. He used to take us for walks only after checking that the fields were empty of anyone else."

(El-Cheikh, 1973, n.p.)

Despite her secluded upbringing, Fatima became a very perceptive and knowledgeable woman who not only had great admiration for her father but resembled him in more than one way. After his passing, Fatima entered politics to preserve the sovereignty of al-Assaad family and proved to be up to the challenge. She was involved in managing and monitoring what her father left behind; people all over the South sought her help – she mediated between people and the authorities, like her father did (El-Cheikh, 1973).

FATIMA AND AHMAD

In 1925, Fatima married her cousin Ahmad Al-Assaad. Through their union, Fatima's political career evolved with her husband's support; he believed that her determination "surpass[ed] that of the greatest men" (Nuwayhid, 1986, p. 105). Reminiscing about her marriage, she said:

"I used to smile and be thrilled when I heard him knock on the door while I was in my room in al-Ṭayba, and when I heard the men calling out: 'Ahmad Bek has arrived from Beirut'... Many times, he used to wake me up in the middle of the night to take my advice regarding matters pertaining to the President of the Republic, at that time Bechara al-Khoury... He knew he had to consult me even if he knew the answer prior. We sat together and considered the matter, looked at it from all angles before coming up with an answer to inform the President of. Everybody knew that he consulted me... I was not smug and did not give my advice on matters I was not knowledgeable of."

(El-Cheikh, 1973, n.p.)

Together, Fatima and Ahmad had three children: Zeinab al-Assaad who married Sabri Hamadeh, Saada al-Assaad who married Assaad al-Assaad, and Kamel al-Assaad who, like his father, became Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament.

AN EXCEPTIONAL LEADER

Describing her political ambitions, Fatima said:

"I ventured into politics drawing strength from my father's experience... I ventured into politics because I wanted to preserve the entity of the al-Assaad family, and not for maintaining its feudalistic status. I do not believe in feudalism; it was a label and not an act. We would never have wanted it to be the reality."

(El-Cheikh, 1973, n.p.)

All throughout her life, her main concern was ensuring that the power, which the al-Assaads had, would remain with her husband and son. Part of her role involved assisting supporters to reach parliamentary and ministerial positions. Women from Jabal ʿĀmil and neighboring villages often paid her visits hoping she would help their husbands or sons win elections. She sometimes met with the candidates themselves to further acquaint herself with their agendas before taking any steps.

All the while, Fatima played a key role in managing the family's election campaigns. Najla recalled that during elections, her grandmother's involvement was so powerful that some candidates were known as "Umm Kamel's candidates" because she used to impose them on the al-Assaad elections list. She particularly favored members of al-Abdullah family, who were her relatives (N. Hamadeh, personal communication, January 26, 2004).

A PIOUS AND PROGRESSIVE WOMAN

When she was not busy managing her family's affairs, Fatima devoted her time to piety as she was eager to get closer to God through worship and benevolence. As a young woman, every time she went to the market with her sister, she never bought anything for herself; instead, she gave the money to people in need (Hamadeh, 1997-1998). Najla believed that Fatima's piety allowed her to help the less fortunate during holy occasions like the month of Ramaḍān; among those she aided were patients suffering from tuberculosis in Bḥanis, Himlīn, and Bārūk hospitals (N. Hamadeh, personal communication, January 26, 2004).

Partly defying traditional clothing, Fatima was the first woman in her family to take off the mullāya, without removing the veil. In fact, she never allowed the veil to prevent her from undertaking her political and social activities. She used to meet with men and discuss matters without sitting face to face with them. They would be seated just outside her sitting room, where they did not see her but could hear her clearly.

AL-ASSAAD'S SON

Fatima's contribution to political and social work went on uninterrupted, until the day her husband passed away in March 1961, at the age of 51 as a result of intestinal hemorrhage. Just like her marriage to Ahmad had been a turning point in Fatima's political involvement, his death marked another. Despite the grief, she kept the same assiduous attention and interest in political issues until she handed over leadership to their only son, Kamel, who became Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament in 1964, 1968, and 1970.

More assertive than his father, Kamel did not follow his mother's opinion to the same extent his father did, nor did he have the patience to discuss all the details with her as their attitudes often differed. Disregarding their clashes, Fatima remained supportive of her son and managed to stay out of his way, without becoming estranged. She stated that:

"I do not interfere with my son, Kamel, or with his approach to politics. At the beginning, and I do not deny it, I tried to interfere when he started having issues with people. I used to tell him that these actions would be harmful to him, but he knew better, apparently. Because I believed in his strength and intelligence, I let him do whatever he wanted after making sure that he took after me in having a sixth sense. When we used to have discussions, I would be persistent, and he would be persistent, but his word was unbreakable; he would always win the argument, not by his words but by the outcome. The outcome would turn out to be in his favor and in favor of his decision. I would admit my mistake and acknowledge that he was right."

(El-Cheikh, 1973, n.p.)

As Kamel's political career developed, Fatima chose to gradually withdraw from public life. She passed away on March 5, 1978, after having been one of the most influential political leaders in the Jabal ʿĀmil region and the whole of South Lebanon for nearly half a century. According to her wishes, she was buried in Damascus near the grave of Sitt Zaynab[5](*Al-Safīr*, 1978).

When she moved to the city, Najla Hamadeh (1997-1998) shared the following story explaining her grandmother's cultural shock:

"When she first moved to Beirut] she was invited to a reception held by a woman from the Beiruti society…So Fatima attended the reception, and was shocked to find that the bulk of the conversation revolved around clothes and adornment, and other details that had never occurred to her would be subject for talk in social gatherings… She did not find in this type of visits something worth her time. Following this incident… she only made a handful of visits to pay respect and condolences."

(p. 449)

Ahmad fancied Fatima since he was a young boy. When he was eight years old, he spotted a ribbon that had fallen from Fatima's hair, picked it up, and kept it as a souvenir. His passion for Fatima remained strong even as he aged, to the point that just a few days before he died, Ahmad persistently asked her to wear a new dress that the tailor had just brought, just to look at her and admire her.

(Hamadeh, 1997-1998)

Fatima famously said: *"Politics is what I am. I can never be bored with it. It is in my blood."*

(El-Cheikh, 1973)

NOTES

1 Ahmad al-Assaad (1902-1961) was a politician and Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament from 5 June 1951 to 1953.

2 Bechara al-Khoury (1890-1964) was the first President of Lebanon, serving from 1943 to 1952.

3 Sabri Hamadeh (1902-1976) was a Lebanese politician and former Speaker of Parliament, serving intermittently between 1943 and 1970.

4 Kamel al-Assaad (1932-2010) was a Lebanese politician and Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, serving intermittently between 1964 and 1984.

5 Sitt Zaynab (626 CE-682 CE) was the daughter of Ali Ben Abi Taleb, the fourth Righteous Caliph after the death of the Prophet Muhammad.

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GEORGETTE ABRAS HITTI[1]

(1913 – 1997)

Fond of politics, Georgette Abras Hitti was a courageous supporter of her husband's political endeavors. She was also one of the few women who dared to confront the French mandate.

1 This profile does not include references, as specific data could not be retrieved due to archival limitations. However, the information was collected from trusted sources and interviews.

CHILDHOOD, EDUCATION, AND MARRIAGE

Born in 1913, Georgette was the daughter of a businessman from Zaḥli. Her mother was from the Farah family, from Muṣayṭaba, Beirut. When she and her sister reached the ages of two and three respectively, their family moved from Zaḥli to Beirut, Lebanon, where they joined *al-ʾAhliyya* National School from which they graduated. Shortly after, Georgette married Dr. Youssef Hitti, who was 18 years older than her.

A WOMAN OF NATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

Throughout her life, Georgette was a young and active woman who not only joined the Red Cross and became a valued member but also worked with her peers on societal projects. Georgette, along with Afifeh Majdalani, Jeanette Tadros, Hnaini Tarcha, and Najla Saab co-founded the journal Ṣawt al-Marʾa and an institution known as *Jamʿiyyat Nisāʾ Lubnān* (N. Klat, personal communication, August 4, 2001). In addition to her early interest in social issues, Georgette took great pride in her Arab identity and fought for Arabism. Several incidents, according to her daughter, Nadia Hitti, illustrated her uncompromising behavior (personal communication, August 4, 2001). For instance, one day, when a French shopper at a textile store called Georgette a "dirty Arab," she hit her on the face. A couple of hours later, the French authorities had sent somebody to her house to apologize for the incident, and a few days later, the woman was forced to leave the country. In another incident at a Red Cross meeting, she stood up and snapped at Eva Helou, who did not speak Arabic fluently, stating, "don't we know anymore how to speak Arabic in this country?" Following this, the minutes of all meetings were all taken in Arabic (personal communication, August 4, 2001).

A PASSION FOR POLITICS

Georgette was one of the few Lebanese women of her time to publicly voice her political views; she participated in demonstrations against the French Mandate and established her own political salon. After gaining popularity, her salon became a regular spot for key politicians such as Bechara al-Khoury, Riad al-Solh, Kamal Jumblatt, Hussein al-Oweini, Abdallah al-Yafi, Saeb Salam, Abdul Hamid Karami, George Hawi, and Youssef Salem.

Dr. Youssef Hitti's interest in politics never matched that of his wife; according to Nadia, her father's involvement in politics was a result of her mother's passionate involvement in the field: "She was interested in politics, I think, more than my father and she pushed him into politics. She used to be very interested in every political movement in the country" (personal communication, August 4, 2001). Unlike their contemporaries and families, the Hittis resisted the sectarian divisions that scared the country at the time. According to their daughter, their neutralism was often confusing. Nadia explained:

"In 1958, at the time of the revolution, people were split... the Muslim and Christian communities had become divided between and among each other. It was very rare even here in our house to find somebody who did not side with a party... only my parents did not follow this trend; at some points you even felt that they opposed the Christians. All in all, however, they used to call for moderation; they believed that the right thing to do was to lend a hand to all friends... Cousins, sisters and other family could not understand my parents' attitude. Despite relentless criticism, my mother never changed hers... She never felt Christian or Maronite; for her, there was only one thing to be: she was first and foremost a Lebanese. She did not change throughout the war. Whereas we, her children, have become polarized, her nationalist feelings dominated other identities despite all the events of the war that annoyed us for a while. She, on the other hand, could never understand how we, her children, have turned out like this... The older she became the more she clung to her stand, cursing all political and military figures who led the war... For her there is only one identity to defend, that of being a Lebanese Arab."

(N. Hitti, personal communication, August 4, 2001)

Georgette often told Nadia anecdotes about the prominent politicians who frequented her salon. For instance, one night, Riad al-Solh came to their home to hide from his assassins. When they knocked at the door at three in the morning asking about him, Georgette told them she did not know his whereabouts. Another evening, Bechara al-Khoury came to Hitti's residence to hold a meeting with Kamal Jumblatt. Learning about this meeting and not wanting it to take place in his absence, Riad al-Solh hurried to see what was going on. When he arrived and knocked on the door, they turned off the lights, opened the window and said to him, "There is no one here." He then left (N. Hitti, personal communication, August 4, 2001).

FROM AMBITION TO DISAPPOINTMENT

Gatherings of prominent Lebanese and foreign political figures at the Hitti residence went on uninterrupted for many years during which Georgette and Yousef had set to become part of the government. Due to Georgette's laborious networking, Yousef became deputy after the parliamentary elections of 1946. In 1957, he became a Cabinet Minister and resigned after the elections that brought down Saeb Salam and Kamal Jumblatt.

Throughout his service, Georgette aimed to help him become President of the Lebanese Republic. As such, in 1958, political meetings that involved the diplomatic body intensified as the date for choosing the new President of the Republic neared. In addition to the ambassadors of influential countries such as Iran, Egypt, and France, the ambassador of the United States (U.S.) used to regularly attend Georgette's salon. According to Nadia, her mother and Robert Daniel Murphy,[2] who was sent by the U.S. to organize the presidential election, held a series of meetings discussing Dr. Youssef's candidacy as Camille Chamoun's[13] term was coming to an end (personal communication, August 4, 2001). The week of the election was very hectic for the Hittis, Nadia recalled; her father was diagnosed with an inter-vertebral disc and had to stay in bed for a while, and Georgette' grandmother passed away:

"Ambassadors and politicians, namely, Mr. Murphy, the Iranian ambassador, the French ambassador, and the three Sunni leaders were meeting with my father at our house. Meetings were going on continuously... My father could not go to the condolences, and my mother could not stay to follow up on the meetings' proceedings... I was still single then, so she asked me to be in charge and report to her what was going on in her absence. I received the politicians and ambassadors, led them to my father's room... and I listened to all conversations... She dropped in every now and then during the day, pretended to be changing her clothes, eavesdropped and interrogated me."

(N. Hitti, personal communication, August 4, 2001)

Nadia also vividly recalled the hopeful mood that dominated the last two days before the presidential election:

"Everybody was so confident; they were discussing topics such as whether Georgette should take off her mourning attire despite her mother's recent death. Because Georgette was very excited for the Presidency, she was willing to stop wearing her mourning clothes... There was talk as to whether Dr. Hitti should prepare himself to live in the presidential palace or stay in his home in Clemenceau... Nothing could have been decided yet. However, even though all leaders including the French, Iranian, and American ambassadors had approved the nomination of my father, there was still Camille Chamoun's point of view... He preferred a military man, General Fouad Chehab,[4] especially given that Dr. Youssef was very close to Kamal Jumblatt, Chamoun's opponent."

(N. Hitti, personal communication, August 4, 2001)

Unfortunately, Dr. Youssef was not elected President of the Republic. While he sighed with relief at the news, Georgette was shattered and was never the same again. She spent nearly 40 years in bed and lost interest in everything. She was an angry and embittered woman the remaining days of her life. Politics remained the only issue that could attract her attention for brief moments before she would sink back into her world of silence (N. Hitti, personal communication, August 4, 2001).

Nadia described her mother as a beautiful and glamorous woman who was courageous and had an insatiable passion for politics.

(N. Hitti, personal communication, August 4, 2001)

NOTES

1 Youssef Hitti (1895-1989) was a prominent Lebanese doctor.

2 Najla Saab (1908-1971) was a Lebanese independence activist and co-founder of the Lebanese Red Cross.

3 Bechara al-Khoury (1890-1964) was the first President of Lebanon, serving from 1943 to 1952.

4 Riad al-Solh (1894-1951) was the first Prime Minister of Lebanon after independence, intermittently from 1943 to 1951.

5 Kamal Jumblatt (1917-1977) was a Lebanese politician and founder of the Progressive Socialist Party.

6 Hussein al-Oweini (1901-1971) was the Prime Minister of Lebanon, serving intermittently between 1951 and 1965.

7 Abdallah al-Yafi (1901-1986) was the Prime Minister of Lebanon, serving intermittently between 1938 and 1969.

8 Saeb Salam (1905-2000) was Prime Minister of Lebanon, serving intermittently between 1952 and 1973.

9 Abdul Hamid Karami (1980-1950) was Prime Minister of Lebanon, serving briefly in 1945.

10 George Hawi (1938-2005) was a Lebanese communist leader and former Secretary-General of the Lebanese Communist Party. He was assassinated in 2005.

11 Youssef Salem (1910-1972) was a Lebanese politician.

12 Robert Daniel Murphy (1894-1978) was an American diplomat.

13 Camille Chamoun (1900-1987) was President of Lebanon, serving from 1952 to 1958.

14 Fouad Chehab (1902-1973) was President of Lebanon, serving from 1958 to 1964.

IBTIHAJ QADDURA

(1893 – 1967)

A leading figure of the early feminist movement in Lebanon, Ibtihaj Qaddura fearlessly defended women's rights and was one of the very first to advocate for women's political representation.

AN OUTSTANDING STUDENT

Born in 1893 in Beirut, Ibtihaj Qaddura, one of seven children, was the daughter of Adib Qaddura and a mother from the Damascene al-Aybesh family. Her father was the first Beiruti Sunni doctor who graduated from the Syrian Protestant College, which is currently the American University of Beirut (AUB), despite objections from his community for joining a non-Muslim institution of higher education (Barhumi, 1987).

Home was Ibtihaj's primary school; this is where her remarkable capacities and talents began to develop and where she first learned to read and write. Years later, she enrolled in the American School for Girls (ASG), which is currently the Lebanese American University (LAU), from which she graduated with high distinction in 1909. She was fluent in Arabic, English and French (Saad al-Din, 1982). As a reward for her remarkable academic performance, Ibtihaj was asked to give a speech at the graduation ceremony; she titled it *Dawr al-Marʾa fī al-Ḥayāt al-Ijtimāʿiyya*.

AN ACTIVE YOUNG WOMAN

When Ibtihaj graduated from school toward the beginning of the 20th century, it was uncommon for young women to pursue higher education. Even though Ibtihaj could not continue her higher education at a university, she set out to continue her education at home, browsing through her father's library and reading his books (Nuwayhid, 1986).

Through this process of self-education, Ibtihaj developed a special interest in religion and the arts. She took piano lessons, learned floral arrangements, knitting, sewing, and published articles on literature, political, social and educational issues under borrowed names in different journals. Additionally, Ibtihaj initiated a series of activities and breakthroughs in the political, national, educational, social, literary, and economic fields.

Ibtihaj advocated for girls' education and attempted to pressure the government to make education compulsory for girls and boys. In 1914, she co-founded the first women's organization in Lebanon alongside several of her friends including Amina Hamzawi and Adila Bayhum[1] and Anbara Salam Khalidi.[2] The organization was called *Jamʿiyyat Yaqaẓat al-Fatāt al-ʿArabiyya* and its purpose was to educate impoverished girls (Nasrallah, 2001). The organization was registered under the name of Najla Beyhum, given the fact that all the founders were still adolescent girls (Barhoumi, 1987). With the breakout of the First World War, however, the association's services became restricted to helping war victims, namely children and homeless people (Nasrallah, 2001). In helping with the casualties, Ibtihaj contracted typhus. She fell seriously ill and nearly died, but she soon recovered and resumed her activities (Nuwayhid, 1986).

When the war ended, Ibtihaj was among the activists who met with the King-Crane delegation,[3] which came to Lebanon to hold a referendum on self-rule in Lebanon and Syria. She gave a speech titled "Wishes of Arab women," in which she demanded the implementation of "the Damascus program." This program emphasized independence, immediate end of the Zionist migration, creation of a democratic and free government, protection of minority rights, and rejection of the United Nations (UN) pact that delegated the management of colonies to the United States (U.S.). The speech she gave earned her the admiration of the committee members who, in turn, gave a remarkably positive report

on her sharpness and fluency in English (Saad al-Din, 1982).

Around that time, Ibtihaj started a campaign to support Lebanese products and handicrafts. She established with several of her friends the first women's cultural club in the Middle East: *Nādī Jamʿiyyat al-Umūr al-Khayriyya lil-Fatayāt al-Muslimāt,* which was equipped with reading and lecture halls and offered acting, music, and photography classes. In 1930, she was elected Dean of *al-Lajna al-Nisāʾiyya li-Dār al-Aytām al-Islāmiyya.* She succeeded, with merit, in maintaining this position for 22 years, until 1952 (Nasrallah, 2001).

Between both world wars, Ibtihaj became committed to defending the Palestinian cause and first journeyed on this route on May 26, 1938. In her capacity as the Head of *al-Ittiḥād al-Nisāʾī al-Lubnānī,* she submitted a remonstration to the British authorities on behalf of Lebanese women represented in the union (Saad al-Din, 1982). Shortly after, on behalf of the women of Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine, she submitted on July 7, 1938 a petition to Huda Shaarawi,[4] Head of *al-Ittiḥād al-Nisāʾī al-ʿArabī,* stressing Arab women's demand for more efforts to defend the Palestinian cause (Saad al-Din, 1982).

AN ARDENT MILITANT FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Ibtihaj was among the first Arab women who campaigned for women's suffrage and political rights. She always believed that "women worldwide were and have always been messengers of peace, relaying the concerns of the people to the ears of the government. It is the government's responsibility, if it truly represents the nation, to listen to the people's voice" (*Ṣawt al-Marʾa*, 1947, p. 4).

In 1943, she launched her motto on women's suffrage: "A woman has the right [to vote]. She is not asking for more. Give her this right!" (Nuwayhid, 1986, p. 209). As President of *al-Majlis al-Nisāʾī al-Lubnānī*, she submitted a letter to the President of the Lebanese Republic, Emile Edde, stating the following:

"Your Excellency, [this petition aims to obtain a clarification about the following statement that you made]: 'I am honored to assert to his Excellency, the President of the French Republic, that the Lebanese government guarantees equality in civil and political rights for all its citizens without discrimination.' This makes me wonder: Is the woman of Lebanese origins? Is the woman that is born and living in Lebanon automatically considered to be Lebanese or not? If she is so, this stands as a clear recognition on behalf of your Excellency of the equality between men and women in civil and political rights. If not, this means that the woman in Lebanon is a foreigner and, in this case, one wonders: what nationality is she?"

(Nasrallah, 2001, p. 120)

In the above petition, Ibtihaj asked President Edde to raise the issue of women's political rights to the French authorities, given that Lebanon was still under the French mandate (Nuwayhid, 1986). When the President did not act on that demand, Ibtihaj went on with the struggle; she called for meetings and conferences and pressured the authorities by submitting petitions and organizing protests. Furthermore, she led demonstrations to the House of Parliament (Barhoumi, 1987). Unfortunately, nothing changed. Following the demonstration, Ibtihaj entered the House along with a delegation that represented the Lebanese Women's Union and handed the House Speaker a letter (Saad al-Din, 1982).

The effort Ibtihaj put in achieving women's political rights was eventually met with success. The first breakthrough occurred in 1953 when the Council of Ministers agreed to grant women suffrage. The move was shortly followed by another significant achievement when Ibtihaj, Laure Tabet,[5] and Helen Rihan were elected members of the Municipal Board of Beirut – a first that any woman made it to membership of this board in the country's history (Nasrallah, 2001). Unfortunately, not many women made it to the board in the following years.

In 1960, eight years after her election to the municipal board, Ibtihaj started another battle, leading a pressure movement for women and men to gain equal access to employment. In 1961, Ibtihaj headed the delegation of Lebanese women to a second conference in Cairo regarding the Palestinian and Algerian causes (Saad al-Din, 1982). During their short stay in Egypt for the conference, the delegation paid a visit to the Egyptian leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser,[6] who received them warmly and encouraged them to proceed with their struggle until Algeria would obtain its independence, and the land of Palestine returns to its people (Saad al-Din, 1982).

A GRACEFUL END

Ibtihaj remained committed to advocating for human rights until the end of her life. She passed away in June 1967, after more than 50 years of continuous hard work to enhance the lives of people in Lebanon, especially women and children.

Luckily, Ibtihaj lived long enough to witness positive changes to women's lives. She also witnessed firsthand the extent of appreciation her country held for her. In 1964, three ceremonies were held to commemorate her golden jubilee in social and political work.

After she passed away in 1967, Ibtihaj was commemorated on several occasions. She was given the Lebanese Order of Merit (grades Knight and Commander), a street was named after her upon the request of the Lebanese Women's Council, and a hall was named after her at the Lebanese Women's Council headquarters (Nasrallah, 2001).

COMMEMORATIVE WORDS

Emily Fares Ibrahim[7] described Ibtihaj, a few years after her passing, as a pillar of the feminist movement:

"She is a trailblazing pioneer who, with her unwavering faith, rose to give the woman her voice in seizing her human rights at a time when that was a heroic act that broke the walls of tradition. I would also list the women's associations and charity organizations and national struggles [that she led]... Our thoughts will always float to her name whenever the feminist struggle is mentioned in the Arab world. A burning tear, pangs of sorrow, a burn, oh how the seminars long for Ibtihaj's absent face."

(Kazma, 1983, p. 6)

That same year, on another occasion, Najla Saab[8] said:

"Ibtihaj was to me a friend whose friendship I was proud of, a role model I emulate, a flame who enlightens me, a guide whose opinion I consult, a leader whom I follow closely with confidence, comfort, respect, and admiration."

"She rebelled, without defiance and disobedience, against women's seclusion from society...she tried creating a new narrative for familial, social, national, and patriotic lives...She took women out of that era of dormancy."

(Kazma, 1983, p. 6)

Laure Moghaizel,[9] in turn, made the following acclamation:

"If you mention her name, memories of the first generation of women leaders cross your mind. The realm of her activities extended way beyond the Lebanese territories and their positive reverberations echoed across the Arab region... With the meeting of our fighter Ibtihaj Qaddura and the pioneer Huda Shaarawi, the goals were unified and the Arab Women's Union was born."

"She was a pioneer in establishing sound Arab relations and utilizing them toward joint goals. She was also a pioneer in raising the feminist voice in our Orient, demanding women's political rights."

(Kazma, 1983, p. 6)

An Incident with Jamal Pasha:[10]

"During the Ottoman Governor Jamal Pasha's visit to a children's bunker, Ibtihaj gave her speech in Arabic, going against the tradition at that time as she was supposed to be saying it in Turkish. As such, he assigned one of his companions to ask her questions that were similar to an interrogation:

Companion: Are you a subject of the Ottoman state?

Ibtihaj: Yes.

Companion: Do you know the Turkish language?

Ibtihaj: No.

Companion: Why don't you speak Turkish since you are an Ottoman subject?

Ibtihaj: Your Excellency, why don't you speak Arabic when it is the language of your religion and the language of the Qur'ān?

A sudden silence followed Ibtihaj's question and the audience feared his violent reaction. To the surprise and relief of all, Pasha gently patted Ibtihaj on the back, saying: 'We shall meet next year. I shall find you speaking Turkish, and you shall find me speaking Arabic.'"

(Nasrallah, 2001, p. 122)

"Qaddura is a burning soul, she reaches the boundaries of a revolution, shakes traditions, and does not dismantle them. She relies on creativity in matters of reform and does not take on unorthodox means. She believes in the importance of being cautious and does not call for any drastic shifts... A believer without prejudice, a hard worker who is not pretentious."

(Nasrallah, 2001, p. 124)

"Before Sri Lanka, India, and England had a woman for prime minister, results of a referendum conducted by a Lebanese newspaper showed that Ibtihaj was unanimously nominated to occupy the position of Prime Minister."

(Abdel-Halim, 1985, p. 41)

NOTES

1 Adila Bayhum (1900-1975) was a Syrian-Lebanese feminist, independence activist, and philanthropist.

2 Anbara Salam Khalidi (1897-1986) was a Lebanese feminist, translator, and writer.

3 This was an American delegation, tasked with assessing the political opinions of local populations in former Ottoman territories in the Middle East.

4 Huda Shaarawi (1879-1947) was an Egyptian nationalist and women's rights activist.

5 Laure Tabet (1895–1981) was a Lebanese women's right activist.

6 Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918-1970) was the President of Egypt, serving from 1954 to 1970.

7 Emily Fares Ibrahim (1914-2011) was a Lebanese-American writer, poet, feminist, and the first woman to ever run for Parliament in Lebanon, in 1953.

8 Najla Saab (1908-1971) was a Lebanese independence activist and co-founder of the Lebanese Red Cross.

9 Laure Moghaizel (1929–1997) was a Lebanese attorney women's rights activist.

10 Jamal Pasha (1872-1922) was an Ottoman military leader during World War I.

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LAURE MOGHAIZEL

(1929 – 1997)

An outstanding woman who tirelessly dedicated her life to champion women's rights in the political field, Laure Moghaizel's countless achievements filled women with pride and inspired them to continue the struggle for women's emancipation.

AN EDUCATIONAL LEGACY

Born in 1929 in Ḥāṣbayyā, Lebanon, Laure Moghaizel grew up in a home that valued education and women's emancipation. Her father, Nassib Nasr, who was an Internal Security Force officer made it clear to his daughter that: "I can't leave you with anything but education... And I will keep educating you until the end" (Shoucair, 2002, p. 12). Similarly, her mother, who came from an affluent family, believed in the value of education and sent Laure to renowned schools.

First, Laure started her elementary education at a Catholic boarding school in Jūnya, *Rāhibāt al-Qalbayn al-Aqdasayn*, along with her sister Nohad Nasr. Three years later, the sisters moved to the Universal College of Aley to live with their parents. During her years there, Laure was exposed to people from different religious backgrounds which allowed her to accept and embrace everyone. After a while, Laure moved from Aley to

Beirut, receiving the Lebanese and French Baccalaureates, and later a degree in law from Saint Joseph University of Beirut (USJ), in addition to degrees in Arabic, philosophy, and law from the Institute of Oriental Studies.

THE LOVE OF A LIFETIME

On a frantic day, on May 29, 1947, Laure met Joseph Moghaizel[1] when they took part in a demonstration held by law students. As protesters clashed with the police, Laure rushed to check on the wounded, developing a friendship with Joseph after he was injured. A year later, the couple married and happily raised five children, three girls and two boys: Nada, Jana, Amal, Fadi, and Naji Moghaizel. According to Laure, they insisted on giving their children Arabic names with no religious indication, in order not to be identified with a specific religion. Nada describes her upbringing as comforting and passionate; she stated, "I was brought up in a happy home; my parents were two people who were living a great love story" (Sfeir, 1998-1999, p. 81).

Despite their happy marriage, Laure and Joseph faced their fair share of tragedies. For instance, their 28-year-old daughter, Jana, passed away right after her return from Paris with a doctoral degree in hand. Of this tragedy, Laure later said: "My wound will not heal nor the wounds of many families who lost a loved one during the war" (*Al-Anwār*, 1992, para. 11). Moreover, their son, Naji, was a child with special needs, and as Laure and her husband took good care of him, they thought of other families who had similar sufferings.

FREEDOM FOR ALL

Throughout her life, Laure's mission was to achieve freedom for all. Over the years, her name became associated with the struggle to attain said right for all Lebanese individuals – women in particular. Her perception of freedom became the driving force that led her to contribute to women's empowerment in Lebanon and the Middle East.

Laure chose her path as a social activist at the ripe age of 17, aiming to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women under the Lebanese law. With time, Laure became a member of 37 committees and associations that dealt with women's and children's rights, family planning, democracy, and human rights at the local, regional, and international levels. Additionally, she founded 13 committees and organizations that were directly involved in 31 conferences related to women over a period of 51 years, from 1945 to 1996 (Aghacy, 1998). The conferences she participated in or organized stretched across the Arab region and the world at large, from Beirut to Copenhagen (Nuwayhed, 1986).

THE "KATĀ'IB" YEARS

In her early life, Laure was impressed by the *Katāʾib's* ideology, and her family had very good ties with the Gemayel family, which pushed her to become a member of the *Katāʾib Youth section* alongside Joseph, who also joined the section during his university years.

After many years of struggle, Laure convinced Pierre Gemayel[2] to accept women in the political arena on the condition that they would refrain from attending the party's office during weekdays when men were present. As a result, women were allowed to meet alone on Saturday afternoons with only a couple of men whose presence was needed. Laure was very active within the party which encouraged more women to register as members; together, they organized many events such as conferences, talks, and trips.

Within the party, Laure was appreciated and respected for her seriousness, intelligence, and humanitarian beliefs. She proved that women could hold political and social responsibilities and resolve the most difficult of matters. However, unlike her counterparts, Laure did not consider her fight a fight against men, but a fight for both men and women. As she stated, "next to every woman striving to work for women, there is a man who believes in equality and wholeheartedly lives it" (*Al-Jumhūr, 1974*, para. 9). Gradually, Laure moved up from being secretary of the Women's Section to being Head of the Women's Issues Division and later became the first female member of the *Katāʾib* party's Bureau for Political Affairs.

In 1957, Joseph resigned from the Katāʾib after failing to make the party accessible to everyone regardless of religious beliefs. Shortly after, on October 6, 1958, Laure resigned as she disagreed with the party's policies and inclinations during the 1958 political crisis. Regardless, she considered herself a "graduate of the *Katāʾib house*" (Shoucair, 2002, p. 42).

A FEAST OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Laure pursued an impressive career in the field of legal and social work. She was one of the founders of the Lebanese Association for Human Rights which played a key-role in introducing amendments to the Lebanese Constitution and campaigned for the rights of every citizen, including women. In addition, Laure authored two guidebooks about women's rights and obligations. As well, in 1963, she was selected as Vice-President of the International Women's Council. As such, she started writing letters to women in the Arab world urging them to create national unions and to join the Arab Women's Federation and International Women's Council. In 1965, she was directing the pooling of proposals and drafting the International Women's Council resolutions in France. This was the first time the Council nominated someone to draft resolutions outside of their native language. Later, Laure played a key role in pressuring the Lebanese Government to sign the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which it finally did on July 24, 1996, with some reservations on a few paragraphs.

In 1968, she was among the first founders of the Democratic Party. Backed by 10 years of partisan experience, she helped her husband write the founding documents of the party whose main purpose was to create a democratic movement without any religious affiliation. The party believed in the protection of human rights and the absolute parity between men and women, in all fields and specializations. Fond of national issues, Laure stated, "I label our concern for public affairs as 'obsession,' while Joseph, my husband, calls it a 'disease'" (*Al-Anwār*, 1992, para. 7).

During the 1980s, finding a way to stop the war was a priority. Together with her husband, Laure founded the Non-Violence Movement. She was aware of the new problems the war had created, namely widowed women, female-headed households, and handicaps. She demanded that such victims be treated decently and receive help. In August 1985, after visiting one home after the other, and one school after the other, Laure and her friends managed to secure 62,533 signatures from people calling for peace. Also, along with a large group of women, she fought for peace and challenged the militias by organizing peaceful demonstrations to protest violence and the killing of innocent civilians. The largest civil protest she helped organize took place on May 6, 1984.

Laure focused on eradicating "legal illiteracy" among women and was the first Arab woman to be appointed to the United Nations Committee for Human Rights. She was awarded the Order of the Cedar, rank of Commander.

THE PASSING OF "MANY WOMEN IN ONE"

Family, friends, and acquaintances all had something extraordinary to say about Laure: "They all agree that she was many women in one" (N. Moghaizel Nasr, personal communication, December 16, 2001), as she was able to merge gracefully the different roles she had as a mother, wife, and lawyer.

When Laure died on May 25, 1997, her coffin was carried by fellow women activists:

"The sight of her coffin carried over the shoulders of women into Sayyidat al-Mukhalliṣ Church in Beirut is an unprecedented though very telling act that sums up the feelings of love, gratitude and loss that most Lebanese women felt on the death of this remarkable woman."

(Aghacy, 1998, p. 2)

"To this day, many concur with her daughter's assertion that 'had she not lived in Lebanon, the country would have been a different place.'"

(N. Moghaizel Nasr, personal communication, December 16, 2001)

"It is not right to tackle the rights of a woman citizen and her duties except after correcting the concepts, standards, and the distorted image of women that is drawn up in the minds of women themselves and in the minds of society."

(Moghaizel, 1977, p. 27)

Laure's friend, Amal Dibo, also remembered:

"I was very lucky to live in the Lebanon Laure lived in. She used to appreciate and respect people who worked hard, especially the young generations."

(A. Dibo, personal communication, May 6, 2001)

"The protection of human rights is the responsibility of every individual; every one of us is concerned with human rights… It is like the air that tightens if it were constrained, reduced, or made absent. Human rights are based on human dignity, so how can people live in a society based on the denial of these rights?"

(L. Moghaizel as cited in Shoucair, 2002, p. 152)

Jacqueline Massabki, a friend and colleague, testified that:

"Laure had grand projects but also worked on details. She did so much for women's rights; for example, she was the one who fought to grant women the right to vote in 1952. I don't want to denigrate the work of other women, but I believe that everything that has been changed in discriminatory laws was achieved thanks to Laure."

(J. Massabki, personal communication, December 16, 2001)

AMONG LAURE'S PUBLICATIONS:

- *Women in the Lebanese legislation according to international conventions, with a comparison with Arab legislations* (Institute of Women's Studies in the Arab World, 1985). (In Arabic).
- *Arab labor laws concerning women.* (1988). (In Arabic).
- Legal guides: *Know your rights.*
- "Your rights at work." (1994).
- "We are citizens." (1996).
- Collective book: *Arab women in personal status: Political and labor laws* (National Council of Lebanese Women, 1975). (In Arabic).
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- Collective Book: *Women and economic development in the Arab world* (Beirut University College, 1988).
- Collective Book: *La femme libanaise témoin de la guerre* (Arab League, 1988). (In French).
- Collective Book: *Miscellany in the memory of Joseph Moghaizel.* (1996).
- Various lectures, studies, interviews, research, articles, booklets, newspaper articles, radio and television interviews on human rights, women's problems and peace (*Nidāʾ al-Waṭan,* 1997).

IN HER LIFETIME LAURE SUCCEEDED IN EARNING LEBANESE WOMEN:

- The right to vote and run for elections (1953);
- Equality in inheritance for non-Muslim denominations (1959);
- Right to choose their nationality (1965);
- Freedom of movement (1974);
- Elimination of provisions punishing contraception (1983);
- Unification of retirement age for men and women under the social security law (1987);
- Recognition of the qualification of women to testify in the Land Register (1993);
- Recognition of the qualification of married women to be involved in business without their husband's permission (1994);
- The right of female employees in the diplomatic service who marry foreigners to pursue their duties (1994);
- The qualification of married women regarding insurance contracts (1995);
- Ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1996).

NOTES

1 Joseph Moghaizel (1924-1995) was a Lebanese politician and renowned legislator.

2 Pierre Gemayel (1905-1984) was the founder of the *Katāʾib party* and a member of the Lebanese parliament.

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LAURE TABET

(1895 – 1981)

Laure Tabet loved art and literature; she yearned for knowledge and education and had a propensity for politics.

CHILDHOOD AND MATRIMONY

Born in 1895, Laure Tabet was raised in a family originally from Tripoli, Lebanon, that had migrated to Egypt in the 1860s. She spent her childhood in Alexandria where she *attended the Ecole Mère de Dieu* school run by the *Soeurs de la Charité*. However, Laure's long residence in Egypt did not push her away from her homeland, where she would spend her summer retreats in Ihdin and Ṣūfar.

After graduating from school and obtaining her Baccalaureate, Laure attended law school.

Two years later, she interrupted her studies to marry Georges Tabet, a then renowned politician. According to her nephew, Paul Klat, his aunt and Georges did not meet coincidentally. One day, when Georges's uncle, Nicolas Sursock, learned that Georges was traveling to Egypt, he asked him for a favor. He wanted him to meet Laure Klat, whose reputation as a beautiful woman had traveled all the way from Alexandria to Lebanon. He wanted Georges to check whether she was as beautiful as people claimed. If so, Nicolas asked Georges to propose to her in his name. When Georges met Laure, he forgot all about his uncle's request, and instantly fell in love with her. He proposed to her, extended his stay in Egypt for a few months, and did not forget to send apologies to his uncle (P. Klat, personal communication, August 4, 2001).

LAURE'S INTERESTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

After the wedding in February 1920, the couple moved to Lebanon, eager to enjoy life to the fullest. Yet, recalling her return, Laure stated:

> *"When I first arrived in Beirut, the city was hardly civilized: there was no cultural or intellectual life, no conferences, no public gardens. I was extremely bored at first by Beirut's lifestyle, which was only punctuated with social calls and obligations."*
>
> (Klat Tabet, 1972, n.p.)

Throughout, Laure supported her husband's political career even though they had major differences in their approach to politics. "Georges was very French, and she was much more nationalist" (P. Klat, personal communication, August 4, 2001). As a pro-Mandate candidate, Georges was elected Member of Parliament and was appointed Cabinet Minister a number of times under Charles Debbas and Emile Eddé. Soon after, Laure initiated her own career as an activist. In the beginning, her journey was restricted to promoting the political career of her husband. Yet, as Laure's journey into politics developed, her husband's involvement in this domain started to wane. He lost his position in the cabinet following the proclamation of Greater Lebanon in 1920. As his pro-Mandate identity stuck with him, his career soon sank into oblivion, while his wife's work moved forward.

With her mother-in-law's help, Laure joined several women's associations as a volunteer and grew involved in a plethora of activities including writing for the journal *Ṣawt al-Marʾa*. In 1937, she was appointed President of the Franco-Lebanese Red Cross and remained at the head of the organization until 1945 when the Lebanese Red Cross was established. Nevertheless, Laure remained involved and was appointed treasurer for a few years before her passing.

In November 1943, just before Lebanon's independence from the French mandate, Laure and other female activists risked gunfire to help free Lebanese political prisoners and participated in demonstrations for three consecutive days. In 1947, she became President of *Jamʿiyyat al-Taḍāmun al-Nisāʾī*, remaining in that position until 1952. Later on, this organization merged with the one headed by the famous Lebanese woman activist Ibtihaj Qaddoura and formed the Lebanese Women's National Council. A year later in 1953, Laure was elected along with Helen Rihan and Qaddoura to become a member of the Beirut Municipal Council. She was among the first women to ever make it to the board, serving under the health and finance committee, monitoring organizations and employees, and fighting poverty. Laure was also among the activists who helped Lebanese women earn their political rights (*Ṣawt al-Marʾa*, 1953).

Laure's political career reached its peak in the late 1950s when she was appointed President of the Lebanese Women's National Council, representative of Lebanon at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, and Vice-President of the International Women's Council. Overall, Laure believed that women ought to prove their abilities to men through "knowledge and culture." As such, she was among those who worked on equal inheritance for women and men among Christian communities.

Despite such comments, Laure's efforts led to the promulgation of the law, which guarantees equality between daughters and sons in inheritance matters for non-Muslims.

Later in 1957, Laure was the first Lebanese woman to run for a parliamentary seat as an independent candidate. Despite her loss, she remained proud for having paved the way for other Lebanese women to pursue their political ambitions.

Alongside her political affairs, Laure devoted much of her time to save the necessary funds for the establishment of the Geitaoui Hospital in Ashrafiyya, Beirut, over a piece of land offered by the Tabet family. To ensure said funds, Laure traveled to different areas, mainly North and South America, with Samia al-Khazen, a close friend of hers. After its establishment, Laure became the president of the hospital's Ladies Committee. In return, to honor her dedication and efforts, the Lebanese government awarded her a medal. Unfortunately, at the time Laure was sick and had to be pushed on a wheelchair to attend (P. Klat, personal communication, August 4, 2001).

LAURE AND HER NEPHEWS

Laure had a solid relationship with her husband Georges, but according to Paul, their marriage was not perfect, "She did not have any children, and her husband was always very busy." Yet, she also recalled her life with George as filled with love and pride, stating that "Forty-six years of common life, not once did we have an argument. I was always proud of him and he of me" (Klat Tabet, 1972).

Given their busy schedules and priorities, Laure postponed having children and by the time she felt ready to build a family, it was too late. As such, she channeled her motherly affection toward charity work, especially "the protection of young girls" (P. Klat, personal communication, August 4, 2001) and her nephews. In one of her letters to her sister, Adele, Laure confides that she hoped her nephews harbored enough affection to take care of her when she could no longer aid herself. Laure's attachment to Paul Tabet, her nephew, only grew as he got older. His wife, Nadia Tabet, explained:

"Every time Laure used to visit us, she used to ask 20 questions: 'Why did you do this?'; 'Why are you wearing this?'; 'Why did you move this chair?'... but I learned my way and I used to reply, 'Because Paul would like that'; 'Because Paul said so'... and somehow this tactic worked. She was more curious than my mother-in-law!"

(personal communication, n.d.)

LAURE'S FINAL DAYS

Along with following up on her responsibilities and caring for her nephews, Laure used to spend long hours reading. She loved art and literature. Her attachment to knowledge and learning was so strong that, when she became blind, her family hired a person to read to her. Paul relates how:

One day, she asked me to get her English books. She was eighty years old and blind. This request shook me because it came from an old woman who did not want to forget the language, although it was unlikely that she would ever have the opportunity to use it again.

Throughout her life, Laure remained religious and conservative but despite her reservations, Laure's conceptualization of the role of women was far from traditional. She was a strong advocate for women's education and participation in social, economic, and political life (P. Klat, personal communication, August 4, 2001). Laure passed away in 1981.

"Laure treated her two nephews like her own children. In fact, when they started school next to her house in Beirut, she was their caregiver during the absence of their mother. As a result, her attachment to the boys grew stronger. To use her nephew's words: 'She practically adopted us.'"

(P. Klat, personal communication, August 4, 2001)

NOTES

1 Nicolas Sursock (1875-1952) was a Lebanese art collector and a member of one of the oldest aristocratic families in Beirut.

2 Charles Debbas (1885-1935) was President of Lebanon under the French Mandate, serving 1926 to 1934.

3 Emile Eddé (1883-1949) was President of Lebanon under the French mandate, serving from 1936 to 1941.

4 Ibtihaj Qaddura (1893–1967) was a Lebanese feminist and political activist.

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MAUD FARGEALLAH

(1909 – 1995)

Although she never held any political position, Maud Fargeallah's impact on the political scene resonated far and wide. She was the woman who could make or break ministers and presidents in her salon.

BACKGROUND AND CHILDHOOD

Born in 1909 in Baʿlabak, Lebanon, Maud Fargeallah was a descendant of the ancient Arab Ghasāsina tribe and came from a family of prelates. Her great-grandfather, Francis Moutran, was a bishop and had written several theology books that were shelved in the Vatican library. She grew up in a family environment geared towards politics and public life. Her father named her Maud after Maud Tabet, the mother of Zalfa Chamoun.

One of Maud's uncles received the title of *Afandī* from the Sultan Abdul Hamid II, her uncle Nakhlé was nominated *Bāshā*, and her other uncles were granted the title of *Bey*.

Her aunt, Victoria Moutran, who lived between Istanbul and Paris, played a major political role on the international level. She received politicians, dignitaries, intellectuals, and businessmen in her salon, and held meetings for the Young Turks movement in her house.

When the First World War broke out in 1914, the Moutrans resided in Baʿlabak. Maud's uncle, Nakhlé, was arrested and detained by the Ottomans in Damascus, her father was seized by the Ottoman authorities, and her two brothers were accused of sympathizing with the Allies – namely the French. Four months later, her father was set free while her uncle was killed in prison, and after two years, her parents were exiled to Changorie in Turkey. Upon the withdrawal of the Ottomans from Lebanon and the arrival of the British to Zaḥli, the Moutran family returned to the country. In 1920, Maud's father passed away after struggling with alcohol consumption and liver cirrhosis, leaving Maud behind as a boarder at the School of the Sisters of *Besançon*, where she stayed until 1922.

A SUCCESSION OF ADMIRERS

In 1926, Maud attended her first *thé dansant* and developed a taste for the flamboyant social gatherings that took place in Beirut. She was often accompanied by Marguerite Chiha to dancing parties organized by the Literary Club in Zaḥli where she gained several admirers including Ibrahim Sursock, Robert Sabbagh, and Joy Tabet, in addition to Camille Chamoun. Her preferred suitor, however, was Henri Philippe Pharaon whom she almost married in 1925 (Moawad, 2003).

"A year later, she got engaged, against her mother's wishes, to Georges Fargeallah, who was 16 years her senior; they married in 1928 and had two children. Being a mother did not prevent her from pursuing and enjoying her social life, or "the dolce vita" as she called it (Fargeallah, 1989, p. 26). Maud gained the reputation of a carefree woman living only for and through mondanités, or 'worldly things'"

(Fargeallah, 1989, p. 69)

LA DOLCE VITA

While Maud spent most of her evenings at the Aero-Club, one of the trendiest nightclubs frequented by the jetsetters of the era, Georges preferred the tranquility of homey dinners where he could enjoy playing cards with a circle of close friends.

Maud, however, attended and regularly organized huge receptions for more than 200 guests. Her circle of friends did not only consist of the richest aristocratic families of Beiruti society but also included some of the most prominent political figures of the time, one of whom was the French High Commissioner who called her "*Maudichon*", a nickname she kept for the rest of her life. Maud was constantly invited to his table, where she met several political figures, and on several occasions, she was also known to facilitate meetings between Lebanese and French officials on socio-economic and political affairs.

STUNG BY THE “VIRUS”

In 1937, when the country was preparing itself for parliamentary elections, a virus known as the “demon of politics” started getting to her (Fargeallah, 1989, p. 78). She was constantly invited to the table of Le Comte de Martel where she met several political figures. Her close connection to de Martel went as far as asking him for favors for the growing number of solicitors who knocked on her door. However, her solid friendship with de Martel did not prevent her from disproving and rejecting his political path. She had a strong inclination for French culture, history, language, and gastronomy, but she did not sympathize with their political stream, namely the Vichy regime, and was more inclined toward British political strategies. Between 1942 and 1948, she organized numerous dancing tea-parties to the profit of the British Red Cross. Furthermore, fundraising gatherings were scheduled every Thursday for 40 convalescent British soldiers.

Maud revealed her penchant toward the British when she “adopted” the British forces upon their arrival to Beirut. She often had officers from the Ninth British Army for lunch or dinner. Soon, she came to know them personally and circulate with high-ranking British officials like Major-General Edward L. Spears. As their friendship developed, Maud grew acquainted with Major General Edward’s wife and secretary. Major General Edward used to call her “white pearl”; he often consulted her and took her opinion into account in several vital decisions (Fargeallah, 1989, p. 114). She maintained a strong friendship with him long after he was transferred back to the United Kingdom.

Given her stances, Maud was branded as anglophile or pro-British, a label she did not mind. She frequently requested services from General Edward for numerous solicitors and her salon remained open for guests, journalists, friends, and needy people. She confessed that although her vibrant social life was a cover-up for the loneliness endured after her marriage, she loved assisting people (Fargeallah, 1989).

WOMAN OF THE INDEPENDENCE

Upon discussing Maud’s life, it is important to mention her contribution to independence. She was eagerly and impatiently asking for the cessation of the French mandate in Lebanon. Her involvement in politics gave her the title “woman of challenging missions” (*Fayrūz*, 1995, para. 3), and during the political turmoil of November 1943, General Edward summoned her to spend some time in Jerusalem because her house was unsafe and surrounded by French security agents.

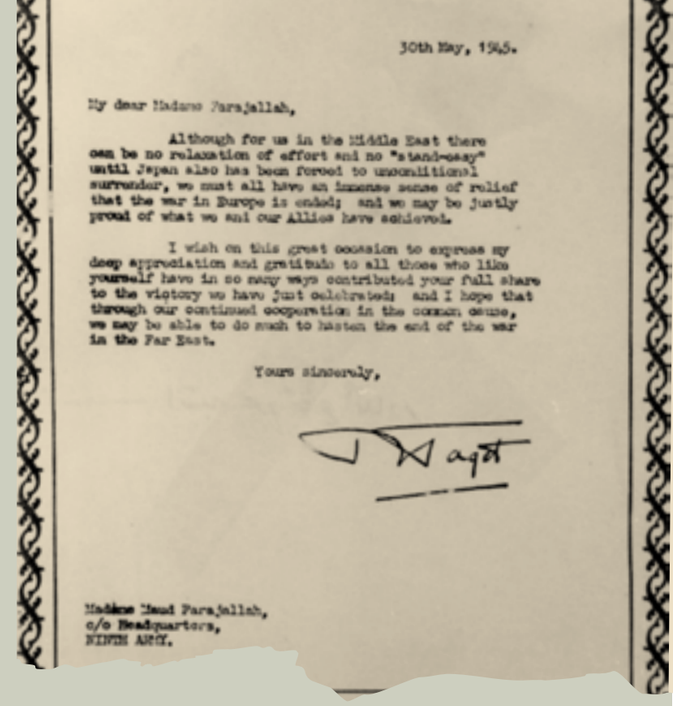
In May 1945, two years after independence and shortly after the armistice was declared, Maud received an appreciation letter from General Bernard Paget. The letter expressed gratitude for her efforts in collaborating with the Allies in English, although her transactions and conversations with the British officers were always carried out in French.

THE LABWA

In 1943, when talks started as to who should become President of the Republic of Lebanon, Maud favored Camille Chamoun over Bechara al-Khoury, despite his young age. She also openly criticized British decision-makers who favored the latter. She could not tolerate President al-Khoury’s abuse of power. She catalyzed an opposition movement that reacted to the deteriorating economic situation and held political meetings in her salon that testified to Camille Chamoun’s benefit. The President of the Republic saw in her the “instigator of spirits” (Fargeallah, 1989, p. 155).

Her growing hostility to Bechara al-Khoury’s regime culminated when she fomented a *coup d’état* with the help of *Amīr* Nouhad Arslan, during the spring of 1946. As a result, she witnessed a violent outburst from her husband who chose to meddle with her political affairs for the first time since their marriage. He believed her actions not only endangered her life, but the lives of their entire family. The failed *coup d’état*, however, did not stop her from pursuing her struggle against the regime. Many joined her opposition movement. For example, Salma Sayegh, President of the *Nahḍa al-Nisā’iyya*, joined her ranks, on Maud’s advice, turning down the medal she had just received from the government. Additionally, Abdul Hamid Karami, then Prime Minister and a very close friend of Maud’s, commented on her attempt to organize a demonstration against the regime by saying, “Maud, you are really strong; you are a *labwa*” (Fargeallah, 1989, p. 166).

To her dismay, Bechara al-Khoury’s mandate was renewed for an additional six years. Assessing Maud’s influence on the local political scene, the President tried in vain to win her to his side.



30th May, 1945.

My dear Madame Farajallah,

Although for us in the Middle East there can be no relaxation of effort and no "stand-easy" until Japan also has been forced to unconditional surrender, we must all have an immense sense of relief that the war in Europe is ended; and we may be justly proud of what we and our Allies have achieved.

I wish on this great occasion to express my deep appreciation and gratitude to all those who like yourself have in so many ways contributed your full share to the victory we have just celebrated; and I hope that through our continued cooperation in the common cause, we may be able to do much to hasten the end of the war in the Far East.

Yours sincerely,

Madame Maud Farajallah,
c/o Headquarters,
NINTH ARMY.

ROYAL RECEPTIONS

Maud’s admirers were numerous. Commodore Peachy, the Admiral of the British fleet in Haifa, fell for the eyes of Maud and brought the whole fleet from Palestine just to see her. Not only was Maud received by high-ranking officials and political figures, but she was also invited by King Abdullah I of Jordan for lunch. Additionally, Queen Elizabeth II invited her to an afternoon tea party in Buckingham Palace. The local radio stations reported her visit to Jordan as a major event. She was the first and only woman to be received at the table of an Arab monarch. Maud was seated at the right-hand side of the King and had the privilege of sharing a cup of coffee with him after lunch.

In the fall of 1952, the long-awaited Presidency of Camille Chamoun saw the light when Bechara al-Khoury was overthrown. Maud’s dream finally came true. Maud was to accompany the presidential couple on several official visits to foreign countries. Eventually, her relationship with Camille Chamoun abated for five years, but her political views did not waver. She remained a “Chamounist” in every way.

In 1955, Maud attended a parliamentary debate session on Algeria at the *Quai d’Orsay* while on a visit to Paris. There, she met Antoine Pinay and openly criticized French foreign policy in the Middle East, particularly in Lebanon, and the way they treated Chamoun by branding him as an anglophile.

NEW ALLIANCES, NEW FRIENDSHIPS

In one of her trips to London in 1952, Maud discovered that all the correspondence she had with her British friends was stored in Commodore Buth's office in 10 Downing Street. Some passages were even underlined in red. The letters, in which she depicted the political situation in Lebanon and her political predictions, constituted a "living representation" (Fargeallah, 1989, p. 222).

In Palestine, at the King David hotel, she met Amal al-Atrash (known as Asmahan). Maud's visits to Palestine were a continuation of the festive life she lived in Beirut. Having very strong connections with the British security forces, she interceded on behalf of Asmahan for the alleviation of the sanctions the British had imposed on her.

One of Maud's greatest achievements was her successful effort in joining Nazira Jumblatt with General William Holmes. Not only was the visit an accomplishment, considering that Nazira was a reputed Francophile, but having her agree to be photographed was another achievement. Nazira consented on condition of being alone with Maud in the picture.

In 1957, after several disappointments with the British and their foreign policy in the Middle East, in Lebanon in particular, Maud decided to cut off her relations with them. She stopped receiving them and accepting their invitations as she forged a new alliance with the United States (U.S.) and established a solid friendship with Donald Read Heath (Fargeallah, 1989).

COUP D'ÉTAT INSTIGATOR

Maud had to pay the price for being a sworn anti-Nasseriste and anti-Chehabist. In 1955, the Egyptian Embassy placed a bomb in her garden in an attempt to kill her. Egyptian newspapers called her, "Mode [fashion] Fargeallah, the woman who did, undid, and fabricated ministers and presidents."

During the blockade of 1958, when Fouad Chehab overthrew Chamoun's regime, the helicopter of Holloway, the Admiral of the sixth American Fleet, picked up Maud, who was spending the summer in *Bois de Boulogne*, and flew her to Beirut to have lunch with him. During that same period, Maud helped Sami al-Solh and his men flee the country with the assistance of Robert Mills McClintock.

Maud's strenuous relationship with Chehab's rule was exacerbated and reached its peak after she confronted him and openly criticized his regime. However, the price she had to pay for opposing the regime was yet to come. Chehab pressured the British and the Americans to stop collaborating with her. As a result, her work with Tapline and the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO) suffered a great deal. He reverted to every single means to force her out of the political scene, but Maud could not stay idle. The opposition, consisting at the time of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), met in her salon, and plans for overthrowing Chehab were clandestinely being organized. The *coup d'etat* failed and as a result Maud was interrogated and forbidden to leave Lebanese territory.

RETREAT FROM PUBLIC LIFE

By 1963, Maud had ended her open political interventions. She was forced to sell her residence to settle her debts in a year she described as the "end of castle life" (Fargeallah, 1989, p. 340). She left for France and spent two and a half years in Paris where she remained under surveillance. In 1969, she lost her husband and daughter; two years later she lost Zalfa Chamoun. The accumulation of these sad events affected Maud deeply.

The outbreak of the civil war in 1975 left Maud completely shattered and devastated. She saw everything she had fought for throughout her life fall to pieces. In 1989, she dedicated her autobiography to "the youth of her country who are passing through rough times and to preserve the past in the memory of the future" (Misk, 2001, p. 56). Maud Fargeallah died at the age of 86 in 1995, leaving behind a rich legacy of women's involvement in politics.

When talking about herself, Maud said, *"To be clairvoyant in politics, one must listen to what people say, search for the motive behind their attitude, reconstruct narratives, discreetly draw out confessions, and finally sum up the situation. Very often I foresaw the future and used this gift for practical ends... One must have a good memory for faces, be a psychologist, love contact with people and finally have politics in the blood, be dynamic, be interested in the society and the country. And like me one must make [politics] his/her goal in life."*

(Fargeallah, 1989, p. 240)

NOTES

1 Zalfa Chamoun was the First Lady of Lebanon (1952-1958), as wife of the then Lebanese president Camille Chamoun.

2 Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1842-1918) was the 34th Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, reigning from 1876 to 1909.

3 Camille Chamoun (1900-1987) was President of Lebanon, serving from 1952 to 1958.

4 Henri Philippe Pharaon (1901–1993) was a Lebanese Minister of Foreign Affairs, serving intermittently between 1945 and 1947.

5 Count Damien de Martel (1878-1940) was a French diplomat.

6 Major-General Edward L. Spears (1886-1974) was a British Army Officer and Member of Parliament.

7 General Bernard Paget (1887-1961) was a British Army Officer and Commander in Chief in the Middle East.

8 Bechara al-Khoury (1890-1964) was the first President of Lebanon, serving from 1943 to 1952.

9 Salma Sayegh (1889–1953) was a Lebanese writer and feminist activist.

10 Abdul Hamid Karami (1980-1950) was Prime Minister of Lebanon, serving briefly in 1945.

11 King Abdullah I of Jordan (1882-1951) was a British-appointed ruler from the Hashemite family, reigning from 1946 to 1951.

12 Elizabeth II (1926-2022) was the queen of the United Kingdoms, reigning from 1952 to 2022.

13 Antoine Pinay (1891-1994) was the Prime Minster of France, serving from 1952 to 1953.

14 Amal al-Atrash (1912-1944) was a Syrian diva, actress, and singer.

15 Nazira Jumblatt (1890-1951) was a prominent Lebanese politician.

16 General William Holmes (1892-1969) was a Commander in Britain's Ninth Army.

17 Donald Read Heath (1894-1981) was a U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon.

18 Fouad Chehab (1902-1973) was President of Lebanon, serving from 1958 to 1964.

19 Sami al-Solh (1887-1968) was the Prime Minister of Lebanon, serving intermittently between 1942 and 1958.

20 Robert Mills McClintock (1909-1976) was a diplomat and U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon.

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NAJLA SAAB

(1908 – 1971)

At a time when very few had the courage to oppose the French Mandate in Lebanon, Najla Saab spearheaded the calls for independence.

CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION

Born in 1908 in ʿAyn Qānā, Lebanon, Najla Saab was raised in a family known for its nationalistic and emancipative ideals. Her father, Mohammad Zeineddine, was a judge, and her mother, Amira Assaad Salim, was renowned for her strength of character and passion for political biographies. The Zeineddine family inhabited a large mansion that housed their entire extended family. Unconventionally, following her father's death, Najla's mother ruled over the house, a responsibility which was not customary at that time; normally, a brother-in-law would have become the caretaker.

Given that back then it was unusual for girls to go to school, Najla received her early education through private tutoring by two of her father's friends who later persuaded him to allow his daughter to pursue her education in a private school in Beirut. However, this project was not realized; before her father could finish the arrangements to send her to Beirut in 1915, a military decree was issued for his exile to Istanbul because of his verbal attacks against Ottoman policies in Lebanon. Following his arrest, Najla's mother invited Jamal Pasha to try to coax him into allowing her husband's return. Najla, who was still young at the time, read a speech her mother had prepared for him. Jamal was moved by her words and promised that her father would return to them soon. Until then, Amira took care of Najla's education and registered her at the American School in Beirut.

As years passed, Najla transferred to the *Pensionnat des Soeurs de St. Joseph de l'Apparition* and finally to the American University of Beirut (AUB) to pursue higher education.

A STABLE AND HAPPY MARRIAGE

In 1925, Najla married Selim Saab, who had just returned from Mexico and was active in development and construction. Throughout their marriage, the couple had five children; their daughter, Samia Saab, recalled that her parents complemented one other:

"My parents formed a strong couple. My father supported my mother a lot and never allowed her to wear a veil. My mother was more courageous, my father more discreet. He was a man of thought, while my mother was a woman of action. He encouraged her to always take action and fight."

(personal communication, August 16, 2000)

NAJLA THE ACTIVIST

Upon marriage, Najla ended her formal education and focused on teaching herself several languages. Ten years later, she became active in women's issues and social work, seeking membership with various associations and clubs. For instance, she joined the Women's Council as a representative of the AUB alumnae and co-founded with other women Bayt al-Yatīm orphanage in ʿAbayh (Nuwayhid, 1986, p. 171). In 1940, she was elected President of *Al-Ittiḥād al-Nisāʾi al-ʿArabī* for a period of three consecutive years (Nuwayhid, 1986).

The mid-1940s were a major period of transition for the region, witnessing the creation of Lebanon as a sovereign national entity and the establishment of the State of Israel. Najla's courage and eloquence made her play a meaningful role in both cases, as she fought for the sovereignty of her country and the rights of the Palestinian people. According to Sami al-Solh:

"She led the feminist movement at a time when the country was facing major obstacles that required the courage and service of all Lebanese men and women. So, in the face of these obstacles that the country endured, she fulfilled her national duty alongside honorable Lebanese women who raised the nation's cause high and served it with integrity and joint action."

(Ṣawt al-Mar'a, 1946, p. 10)

Najla also made sure to involve her family as much as possible in the causes that she stood up for. Samia recalled:

"Sometimes she used to come into my room to read me what she wrote. I'd say, 'Mom, change this sentence, make it bolder.' But she'd always answer that she could only put it this way, because you had to remain diplomatic if you wanted to achieve anything."

(S. Saab, personal communication, August 16, 2000)

NAJLA'S PERSONAL CONTRIBUTION TO LEBANON'S INDEPENDENCE

On November 11, 1943, Lebanon's President and Prime Minister as well as several cabinet ministers were imprisoned in the fortress of Rāshayā, on the orders of the High Commissioner of the French Mandate. Lebanese people revolted against the detainment. Lebanese women, with Najla at the forefront, organized demonstrations and visited embassies that called for the release of the prisoners and the withdrawal of French troops. The protests continued for almost 20 days (Nuwayhid, 1986). In 1947, in remembrance of Independence Day, Najla made a speech that marked people for years to follow. She said:

"This day marks the end of the colonization and the beginning of a process of building. To build, we must have available forces, join efforts, and for these efforts to blossom and be organized initially by us and under the leadership of our beloved president… Our goal after today, is to build a national entity, based on the principles of justice, forgiveness, cooperation and seriousness…The greatness of this day is that it stems from the people's will and cry for liberty."

(*Ṣawt al-Mar'a*, 1947, p. 11)

DEFENDING THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

That same year, Najla rose to defend the Palestinian people in another memorable speech when she presented her report to the Anglo-American Palestine Inquiry Committee:

"Palestine is a part of our Arab [world] and we do not admit that any foreign power whatsoever could and can claim to acquire or obtain and hold rights to dispose of the future of that territory... We shall educate our children to continue the endeavor for liberation of their country... We count our friends only among those who stand with us for liberty and peace in the Arab East."

(Sa'ab, 1947, pp. 1- 3)

REPRESENTING LEBANON

As the head of many women's organizations, Najla went on several trips to attend conferences. In 1944, she represented Lebanese women at the Arab Women's Conference in Cairo at the invitation of Huda Shaarawi, head of the Arab Women's Organization at the time. She also represented Lebanese women at the 1946 UNESCO Conference and in the UN Committee for Women's Rights. Additionally, in 1963, Najla attended the International Red Cross Conference in Geneva as one of the co-founders of the Lebanese Red Cross, and in 1968, joined the International Federation of Human Rights meeting in Teheran.

ACTIVISM AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Najla continued her activism for more than 40 years. She was an inspiration to many other prominent Lebanese women, such as Ibtihaj Qaddura and Alexandra Issa al-Khoury. She asked her family to establish a library named after her in the building of the Lebanese Women's Council and to give a scholarship to a nursing student in the Lebanese Red Cross.

On May 10, 1971, Najla passed away after a life dedicated to benevolence, promoting women's rights, and fighting for the sovereignty of Lebanon and the Arab world.

HONORING AND RECOGNITION

In recognition of her achievements and dedication to the women's cause, Najla Saab received the following decorations: the Lebanese Silver Order of Merit (1943), the National Order of the Cedars with the rank of "Chevalier" (1946), the Lebanese Golden Order of Merit (1971), and the National Order of the Cedars with the rank of "Grand Chevalier" (1971).

"During one of the demonstrations in 1943, the protesters arrived at Riad al Solh's house to ask his wife, Fayza al-Jabiri, to join them. Then, Senegalese soldier stopped the pregnant Najla, telling her to retreat or he would shoot.

According to Samia, she replied, *"Go ahead, we will not stop. Shoot me! Shoot twice!' And the demonstration continued"*

(S. Saab, personal communication, August 16, 2000).

NOTES

1 Jamal Pasha (1872-1922) was an Ottoman military leader during World War I.

2 Sami al-Solh (1887-1968) was Prime Minister of Lebanon, serving intermittently between 1942 and 1958.

3 Huda Shaarawi (1879-1947) was an Egyptian nationalist and women's rights activist.

4 Ibtihaj Qaddura (1893–1967) was a Lebanese feminist and political activist.

5 Alexandra Issa al-Khoury (1926-1997) was the President of the Lebanese Red Cross.

6 Riad al-Solh (1894-1951) was the first Prime Minister of Lebanon after independence, intermittently from 1943 to 1951.

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NAZIRA JUMBLATT

(1890 – 1951)

Nazira Jumblatt was an extraordinary woman who led with passion and conviction, earning the trust of those around her. She was not only a visionary leader, but also a servant of her community.

BACKGROUND AND FAMILY

Born in 1890 in ʿAyn Qinya, Lebanon, Nazira Jumblatt was the daughter of Faris Jumblatt and Farida Said Jumblatt. Unlike most girls of her time, she received an education at home and grew up to be proficient in Arabic, English, and French.

In 1915, Nazira married Fouad Jumblatt, who was appointed *Qāʾim Maqām* of the Shūf area by the Ottoman authorities. Their marriage epitomized the revival of matrimonial relationships among cousins in the Jumblatt family given they had grown up in the same household and had a common grandmother.

In 1916, Nazira gave birth to Leila Jumblatt and less than a year later, she gave birth to Kamal Jumblatt. Upon his birth, many rushed to al-Mukhtāra Palace to congratulate Fouad on his newborn heir. Nazira was so grateful for having a boy that she walked barefoot to Saint Aʿabda in Dayr al-Qamar to fulfill a vow, soon after giving birth. Unfortunately, shortly after Kamal was born, Leila contracted typhus and passed away before the doctors could treat her. Later, in 1921, Nazira gave birth to her third and last child, Linda Jumblatt. That same year, Fouad was assassinated.

THE RISE OF THE *ZAʿĪMA* WITH A FOCUSED AND PRAGMATIC APPROACH

Upon Fouad's death, Nazira took over leadership to preserve the reign of the Jumblatt family in al-Mukhtāra while waiting for Kamal to become of age (Abdel Samad, 1997-1998). The 32-year-old then held the position for 21 years before her son took over. According to May Arslan, Nazira's daughter-in-law:

"It seems to me that she ventured into politics, in the avid way she did, in order to fill the sudden emptiness that befell her when her husband tragically died. Authorities of the French mandate proposed to her to be the Jabal's leader and she accepted. She was confident that she was up to an effective political role. She was so intelligent. This trait specifically enabled her to be confident that she could play the role... she turned out to be an impressively influential and powerful woman. She did not study politics, yet she had an impressive talent when it came to handling political issues. It was as if it was a second nature to her... Although she never spoke about women's rights, I am sure she believed in them and she was a feminist without knowing it... At the time, women were not supposed to venture into the public sphere, so she appointed male assistants as her delegates to help her govern the Jabal."

(Personal communication, April 17, 2003)

Although Nazira had a moderate attitude toward both Christian and French authorities, she did her best to bring Druze and Christians to an agreement. She constantly called on both parties to overcome past tensions and differences regarding the mandate. As such, she gained reverence in the Maronite milieu, and always consulted with the Maronite Patriarch Augustinus al-Bustani, Amin Abu Khudr, and Dr. Philip Hitti.

Nina added that along with good relations with local authorities, Nazira succeeded in maintaining a moderate stand regarding the struggle between the French occupation and the resistance movement led by Druze rebels. She collaborated with the French authorities without jeopardizing her people's interests. In return, the French declared her the greatest friend of France and set up a police station in the Shūf to assist her efforts to curb the resistance movement and maintain order in the area. Additionally, the French High Commissioner often visited Mukhtāra after his meetings with the Maronite Patriarch which Nazira facilitated.

Similarly, other commissionaires visited her and considered her recommendations before going to Bkirkī (Atallah, 1975). It was often said that "in order to have a successful trip to Lebanon, foreign dignitaries had to do three things: visit Marjaʿyūn, pay their respects to the Maronite patriarch at Bkirkī, and call on Nazira Jumblatt at Mukhtāra" (Kairallah, 1996, p. 138). Hence, the French authorities decorated Nazira with the *medal of Chevalier* in the Legion of Honor.

According to Nina, Nazira was often successful at rescuing people convicted by the French authorities; she was able to save 12 men from being hanged (personal communication, April 17, 2003). Additionally, in 1925, she prevented the war that was about to erupt between the French and the Druze rebels. Furthermore, when a French troop entered al- Shūf during the events of 1926 to quell the rebels in Baʿdarān, Nazira requested a meeting with the commander of the expeditionary force and reached an agreement with him (Khairallah, 1996). Eventually, the French withdrew trusting Nazira to maintain peace in the region.

Throughout Nazira's reign, al-Mukhtāra palace became the meeting place of the most prominent local and foreign political figures during the French mandate, in addition to the American, English, and French journalists who became regular visitors. Nazira, who valued the diverse opinions that she gathered, knew how to impose her will and set strict standards and goals for herself and her people. Her poise and dedication resulted in the following saying: "If you arrive to Lebanon and not visit Bkirkī and al-Mukhtāra, it is as though you visited Rome and did not see the Vatican" (*Al-Nahār*, 2000, p. 13). Bustros (1951) reflects on the saying and Nazira's tact:

"Neither the superiority, nor the tact and intelligence of Nazira Jumblatt would have been enough for her to wield the power of a leader over a population of 80,000 souls without the deep-seated respect of Druze people to women."

(p. 43)

VISITORS OF THE MUKHTĀRA

Abiding by the reigning Druze moral code, Nazira rarely left the Mukhtāra castle; restricting her visits to paying condolences in nearby villages. At the same time, her mansion was the pilgrimage place for supporters whom she received starting five o'clock in the morning until midnight.

For practical purposes, Nazira eventually assigned specific days of the week to receive visitors. For instance, women from neighboring villages used to come in groups on assigned days. Whether her guests aimed to greet her or seek her help, she made sure to welcome them; she even helped resolve marital problems and had a room full of toys ready to receive kids who came with their parents. Additionally, Nazira helped people from all over the country who sought her help. She also often played the role of a mediator to settle grievances in the Jabal (Abdel- Samad, 1997-1998).

Among her frequent visitors were Christian and Druze notables whom she invited to lunch to discuss national issues. Her generosity and hospitality often impressed her guests; she also never forgot to thank them and express her gratitude through speeches and letters (Abdel-Samad, 1997-1998). Furthermore, Nina added:

"[Nazira] was very practical and intelligent. She could deal with top ranking officials although she had not been to school or college. She acquired the know-how by practice... At the same time, she took good care of both her children and her career... She had lots of connections given the way she dealt with people. She made sure that she met all visitors of the Shūf ... not because she wanted to be recognized, but because she wanted to see them. This is how she built up her knowledge."

(N. Jumblatt, personal communication, May 20, 2000)

About the lifestyle that Nazira led for many years, May stated:

"She rarely left the house. She was well surrounded by faithful supporters round the clock... everybody admired her. I am sure they spoke highly of her."

(personal communication, April 17, 2003)

For many years, Nazira received her visitors with a veil that covered her face leaving her eyes showing and wore the traditional female Druze conservative outfit (Khairallah, 1996). She never met with French political figures and officers without the presence of at least one religious authority. In time, she chose to introduce minor changes to the way she dressed (al-Beainy, 1987). For instance, when she received her non-Arab guests, she used to wear a European-style velvet dress, while keeping the veil over her face (Timoviev, 2000). Nazira also welcomed her guests by speaking French and English perfectly.

A CHARMING PERSONALITY

Overall, Nazira was admired for her strong personality, outstanding political skills, and for her social and communication skills. Nina underscored Nazira's humility and helpfulness. She narrated the following incident:

"Once, when the British High Commissioner was visiting her, the Chief of Protocol came and whispered something to my grandmother. She excused herself and left the room and it was long before she returned. The High Commissioner did not appreciate what she did, so he followed her. He found her sitting with a group of Druze men who, according to him, were "not important" people and, thus, did not deserve any attention. He went back to the salon and waited for her. When she returned, he reproached her for leaving him for these people. So, my grandmother told him, had it not been for the shurwāl, the ṭarbūsh would not have existed, and had it not been for them, I would not have had the chance to receive you here at my house; I owe them what I am and not to you."

(N. Jumblatt, personal communication, May 20, 2000)

Furthermore, May, Nazira's daughter-in-law, asserted that:

"She had a fine presence. Whenever she stepped into the room, everybody stopped talking. Whenever she started talking everybody listened... And she was an eloquent speaker! It was very remarkable how fluent and capturing she was when she spoke. She was little worded, always to the point, and made no mistakes while she spoke… Most important of all she was fun to be with. Simply, she was a charming woman, be it the way she sat, the way she spoke, or dressed."

(M. Arslan, personal communication, April 17, 2003)

PRESERVING LEADERSHIP IN THE HANDS OF THE JUMBLATT FAMILY

In her struggle to keep the leadership in the hands of the Jumblatt family, Nazira arranged for her daughter, Linda, to marry Hikmat Jumblatt. He was an educated, clever, and wise man whom she knew she could entrust with the mission of representing the Jumblatts until Kamal took over.

In 1939, Nazira installed Hikmat as a member of Parliament. Throughout his term, she gave him several political tasks that he faithfully fulfilled with her consultation and approval. Unfortunately, his time as a deputy was cut short when he succumbed to illness in 1943. Upon Hikmat's death, Nazira had to think of someone to fill the Jumblatt seat in Parliament; in her opinion, Kamal was not ready yet; consequently, Rachid Jumblatt was chosen for the task. Soon, however, surprising everyone including his mother, Kamal decided to assume the leadership of the Druze community in Mukhtāra.

NAZIRA AND MAY: AN UNEXPECTED UNION

Despite decades of feuding over the Shūf leadership with the Arslans, Nazira dared to follow Amine Nakhle's advice; the family friend suggested she unite both families by marrying Kamal to May, Shakib Arslan's daughter. However, the Arslans did not appreciate the offer; May recalled her father asking Nazira, "How dare you make such a proposal?" (M. Arslan, personal communication, April 17, 2003).

In 1948 and after Amine Nakhle's mediation, Kamal and May got married. The couple lived in Mukhtāra with Nazira. May said, "I was the first Arslani woman to change her family name into Jumblatt and this, for me, was a stroke of luck that I shall always remain thankful for!" (personal communication, April 17, 2003). May's relationship with her mother-in-law was quite fulfilling. In May's words:

"Nazira was such a hilarious woman! She told me, 'Somebody told me that I reminded them of Queen Victoria, what do you think?' So, I replied, 'Yes, sure you do! You are even better than her.' So, Nazira said, 'How come?' I told her, 'She comes from a royal family; she had servants to do things for her, whereas you built your stature out of nothing!' She commented, 'Yes, yes! You're right!'"

(M. Arslan, personal communication, April 17, 2003)

NAZIRA'S WITHDRAWAL FROM THE POLITICAL SCENE

As of 1942, Nazira gradually left the political scene, and let her son lead the way he thought most appropriate. She did her best to respect his ideas and his approach to politics, although it radically differed from her own; Kamal, in turn, respected his mother and admired her personality. As he proceeded with the realization of his socialist dream that culminated in the establishment of the Progressive Socialist Party, Nazira chose to retreat further from the political arena. What started as differences in perspective and style of leadership between Nazira and Kamal soon developed into a deep rupture that lasted until her death on March 27, 1951. She spent 21 days in the hospital, including nine days in a coma until she succumbed to kidney failure.

Throughout that time, Nazira refused to see any of the politicians who gathered to see her. Instead, she dedicated her last days to her loyal life-long supporters to show them how much she appreciated what they had done.

Nazira was not forgotten after her death. Her glorious career remained alive in the memory of her family, the Druze community, and the general Lebanese society. Prominent Lebanese figures such as Evelyne Bustros, Maud Fargeallah, and Bechara al-Khoury refer to her in their memoirs. Additionally, her family members recalled with nostalgia her impressive style and achievements.

After meeting Nazira Jumblatt, Riad al-Solh once told President Bechara al-Khoury, *"Your Excellency, we thought we were masters of the game of politics, but after meeting Nazira Jumblatt, we found that we were only apprentices."*

(Khairallah, 1996, p. 143)

According to her granddaughter Nazira Jumblatt (also known as Nina), on the day her husband passed away, Nazira was with a woman who was reading her coffee cup. The woman told her, *"Oh my God! Sitt Nazira, I see something bad... Bad news is coming your way. I see something being carried to your home."* The woman had barely uttered these words when Fouad was brought in, already dead.

(personal communication, May 20, 2000)

NOTES

1 A notable Lebanese Maronite Bishop

2 Philip Hitti (1886–1978) was a Lebanese-American professor, scholar, and president of al-ʾAhliyya School's Committee of Supporters and Friends in New York.

3 Hikmat Jumblatt (1905-1943) was a Lebanese politician.

4 Rachid Jumblatt (date uknown-1959) was a Lebanese Druze politician who lived through the late Ottoman period and both World Wars, playing an important role during the French Mandate over Lebanon and Syria.

5 Amine Nakhle (1901-1976) was a Lebanese lawyer, writer, and poet.

6 Shakib Arslan (1869-1946) was a Lebanese writer, poet, historian, and politician.

7 Alexandrina Victoria (1819-1901) was Queen of the United Kingdom, reigning from 1837 to 1901.

8 Evelyne Bustros (1878-1971) was a Lebanese writer.

9 Maud Fargeallah (1909-1995) was a Lebanese political activist.

10 Bechara al-Khoury (1890-1964) was the first President of Lebanon, serving from 1943 to 1952.

11 Riad al-Solh (1894-1951) was the first Prime Minister of Lebanon after independence, intermittently from 1943 to 1951.

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NINA TRAD HELOU

(1905 –1989)

Nina Trad Helou broke barriers and redefined norms to become one of the first women lawyers in Lebanon. Her attitude lit the way for others to defy odds and pursue their dreams

A DEPENDABLE DAUGHTER AND A PIONEER LAWYER

Born in 1905 in Bogota, Colombia, Nina Trad was the daughter of a Lebanese father, Michel Trad, and a Colombian mother. As she was about to graduate from high school in Lebanon, her father passed away. Nina was left with no choice but to teach Italian at the Louise Wegman School to support her mother and three siblings. Meanwhile, she was attending the Saint-Joseph University of Beirut (USJ) to study law despite her family's disapproval. Law was thought to be a strictly male franchise. Therefore, everybody was skeptical about a woman's chances to be admitted to the Bar.

At the beginning of her journey as a lawyer, Nina's uncle, Petro Trad, attempted to change her mind to pursue a more socially accepted major. Yet, her qualifications and determination turned him into her biggest supporter (Nuwayhid, 2000a). By 1932, Nina had already become a pioneer lawyer in Lebanon and the first woman to become a member of the Beirut Bar Association (La Revue du Liban, 1935). It took the lawyers' council long debates before they finally decided to break the rule and admit a woman among them. She became known among judges and colleagues who admired her performance in court (Nuwayhid, 2000a).

A COLLEAGUE AND A LIFE PARTNER

Nina met Charles Helou at USJ where they were both studying law. Later, during her career, she was assigned several cases on which she collaborated with Helou, a prominent lawyer at the time. Gradually, Nina and Charles's professional endeavors developed into a close friendship that grew into a love story (Nuwayhid, 2000a). According to Charles, "I fell in love with her, and I started dreaming of her, and so my emotional journey with this young and respectful lawyer, the daughter of a well-established family, began. This lawyer whose intelligence gives her an additional charm. And perhaps what intrigued me is her mature mind and her composure" (Nuwayhid, 2000a, p. 87).

According to Charles, despite their shared interests, their families disapproved of their decision to get married, as Nina was seven years older than Charles and had a different religious upbringing. Charles's family even resorted to Michel Chiha, a role model of his, for support. Michel, however, often complimented Nina and encouraged Charles to make his own decisions even if they clashed with his parents' wishes (C. Helou, personal communication, August 16, 2000). According to Charles, Nina, who always enjoyed their work partnership at the same law firm, feared that their marriage was a deterrent to their happiness (Helou, 1991).

Fortunately, Charles' determination to overcome all obstacles was stronger than Nina's hesitation. He was able to calm her fears and mend her attempts to "set him free." After 10 years together, Charles and Nina got married in a ceremony of only four people: themselves, Michel, and César Mahfoud (C. Helou, personal communication, August 16, 2000). On that day, the age difference and the worries associated with it ceased (Helou, 1991). For many years after, they reported the same year of birth on their passports (Charles's date of birth) and on all other documents. Charles recalled, "Whenever we had to identify ourselves, at hotels, airplanes, clinics, hospitals, we always said that we were the same age" (Helou, 1991, p. 51).

NINA'S OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

Alongside her career, Nina's life was marked by a series of breakthroughs. For instance, in 1948, the Papal ambassador in Lebanon chose her to represent the Vatican in the first UNESCO meeting in Beirut (Nuwayhid, 2000b). She was also the first woman member of the Beirut Municipality Council. Charles maintained that as part of her plan to improve the urban environment, Nina planted and filled the city with flowers. Although many did not support her initiative, she proceeded with her plan, undeterred. With time, Nina's flowers bloomed everywhere representing hope and life amid the ruins of war (Helou, 1991). Then in 1951, Nina contributed to the management of Charles's first campaign for parliamentary elections.

In 1964, Charles became President of the Lebanese Republic. As First Lady, Nina demonstrated a remarkable devotion; she managed the building of the Ba'abda presidential palace and decorated it with mosaics and other ornaments that were borrowed from the National Museum with the help of *Amīr* Maurice Chehab, General Director of Antiquities. Additionally, she restored and enlarged the Bayt al-Dīn Presidential Palace for tourists and supervised the addition of a new wing designated to function as a guest house.

Nina was a remarkably charitable First Lady. She encouraged and supported the establishment of several organizations dedicated to philanthropic and humanitarian services (*Al-Safīr*, 1989) and supported women's organizations that specialized in childcare. In her capacity as the honorary President of the Red Cross, and later as a founding member of the chain of free meal restaurants, Restos du Coeur established in Lebanon in 1983, Nina helped a lot of poor and ill people. Recalling her philanthropic deeds in his memoirs, Charles stated:

"[Nina] gave the greatest importance and attention to her social duties. She was the honorary President of the Red Cross… She helped various Muslim and Christian charities. Many organizations benefited from her attention and fervor."

(Helou, 1991, pp. 130-131)

UNEXPECTED ILLNESS

Unfortunately, Nina was diagnosed with breast cancer in April 1987. After the diagnosis, she tried to lead a normal life, doing her best to remain active within the limits sanctioned by her health status. She used to spend some of her time filing Charles's documents, teaching his secretaries to organize his archives, and observing the performance of other personnel.

Despite the civil war at the time, Charles made necessary arrangements for a specialist to come from France to deliberate with local doctors and come up with the final diagnosis and appropriate treatment. She began chemotherapy on the seventh of May and as it went the Lebanese war became more violent leaving Charles in a complicated position (Helou, 1991). Recalling this phase Charles stated:

"Nina's concern throughout was not to bother anyone. Even when she had the three girls [helpers] attending to her needs round the clock, she did her best to be economic with calls for help. She paid attention to everything around her. She knew for example which movies and series the girls liked… Whenever she needed something and they were watching TV, she waited for the episode to end before she called on them. When she needed something urgently and she had to interrupt it, she asked me to set up the TV so that the girl would not have to miss the course of events."

(Helou, 1991, p. 89)

Throughout that time, Nina showed an admirable extent of patience and perseverance. According to Charles, she often worried about him and one day said, "I wonder if I am worth all the trouble I have put and am putting you through… I want to heal so much just to make you happy" (Helou, 1991, p. 54). For a while her body seemed to respond to the treatment; by the summer of 1988, doctors were congratulating her for improving. However, around the end of February 1989, blood tests showed deterioration in her condition. As the days went by, she felt weaker and incapable to snap out of a lingering lassitude, which seemed to drag her into a state of darkness.

As Nina's status was worsening, the war followed suit; reaching an unprecedented peak around February 1989. More precautions had to be taken to comfort Nina under the constant threat of shelling. This resulted in Nina spending her last days sheltering in a corridor with her husband and helpers.

THE END OF A RICH LIFE

Nina passed away on March 26, 1989, on a Sunday afternoon, after almost three years of struggle.

In a eulogy, Patriarch Mar Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir described her as *"a partner in offering consolation, inspiring determination, and holding firmly to principles and commitments,"* adding that *"at the foremost is her commitment to Lebanon with freedom, faith in God, and the valuable human values."*

(Nuwayhid, 2000b, p. 825).

Her husband recalled that Nina's admirable tolerance of her malady is explained by the strategy she employed:

"She never spoke about her illness… she never refused any treatment that was suspected to have soothing or healing powers for her case, and she never complained about side effects of her medications. In addition, she meticulously followed doctors' instructions, and she was always keen to provide them with accurate information about her status."

(Helou, 1991, p. 131-132)

Besides the prayers that appeased her soul, the last words Nina heard before she died were those of verses chosen from some of her all-time favorite poems. Charles, who remained by her side during her last few days, chose verses he knew she would be delighted to hear again (Helou, 1991). Recalling those last moments together, Charles narrated:

"[The very last verse went]: "When you will hear this voice, and I won't be here. Say that I was not able to tell you that here, in Paradise, everything is like they told us; wonderful. But me, thanks to you, I had already experienced it on earth." She paid close attention as I repeated these verses. She was very touched by something stronger than her illness. When I thought I should stop in order to give her a break, I closed the book and asked her, "Are you happy?" She put on a wonderful smile, bent her head approvingly, and tried to give out an audible "yes" that never came out. Believe me, it was a beautiful Sunday."

(Helou, 1991, p. 136)

"The Restos du Coeur, Charles Helou explained, is a project intended to be a message of fraternity among Lebanese people. It has been intended to reach the greatest number of people from all backgrounds with the greatest variety of assistance. An association was soon founded to support the country's chain of restaurant development. The intention was to spread into the Muslim regions too, but at the time, this was close to a mission impossible. Movement was restricted due to demarcation lines and barricades during the civil war."

(C. Helou, personal communication, August 16, 2000)

Michel al-Khoury described Charles and Nina as a "couple of excellence": *"In my opinion, [Charles's] marriage to Nina Trad is the event that shaped his life favorably. They chose each other and their union turned out to be a solid partnership based on a common aspiration for excellence."*

(El-Khoury, 2001, para. 2)

Charles once said: *"[Nina] is the rare friend and the loyal wife that was sent to me from above. She was a grace from God. My successes in life multiplied [since she entered my life]."*

(Nuwayhid, 2000a, p. 87)

NOTES

1 Michel Chiha (1891-1954) was a Lebanese politician, banker and writer.

2 Maurice Chehab (1904-1994) was a Lebanese archaeologist.

3 Mar Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir (1920-2019) was the Patriarch of Antioch and all the East.

4 Michel al-Khoury (1926) is a Lebanese politician and former governor of the Central Bank, serving from 1978 and 1983 and from 1991 to 1993.

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SOURAYA AL-KHATIB ADRA

(1909 – 1995)

Souraya al-Khatib Adra was an activist who worked hard to enhance women's political rights in Lebanon and the Arab world. She firmly believed that women could play roles that extend beyond motherhood and mere social service.

CHILDHOOD: A SUPPORTIVE FATHER

Born in 1909 in Baʿlabak, Lebanon, she was the daughter of Judge *al-Shaykh* Abdul Qader al-Khatib and the niece of Seifuddin al-Khatib, an Arab martyr for independence who was hanged with several of his patriots in 1916 by Jamal Pasha in ʿĀlay, Mount Lebanon. Although Souraya grew up in a conservative milieu, her father did not enforce any traditional constraints on her: he was reportedly "an understanding judge" who "even aimed to educate his daughters before his sons" (B.A., 1978, n.p.).

AMONG THE FIRST WOMEN TO GRADUATE FROM COLLEGE

Souraya attended the Jesuit St. Joseph School in Damascus and Beirut between 1919 and 1928. In 1931, she graduated from the American Junior College for Women (AJCW), which is currently the Lebanese American University (LAU). She was among the first generation of women from prominent aristocratic Beiruti families to graduate from there. Throughout her academic life, Souraya was proficient in Arabic, English, and French. She was also a music lover who played the piano and practiced sports like yoga and cycling in her free time.

MARITAL LIFE

Shortly after graduating, Souraya married Abdallah Adra, an American University of Beirut (AUB) graduate and professor. The couple lived in France for a few years as they pursued higher studies (Haydar, 1995). Souraya became closely acquainted with French culture and visited major European cities such as Berlin and Geneva. In 1932, toward the end of their stay in France, Souraya obtained a driver's license in Marseille and was close to being the first Lebanese woman to obtain a driver's license. A while later, Souraya and Abdallah returned to Lebanon with their three children; they settled in Tripoli for a few years during which Souraya chose to dedicate her time to family (A. Adra, personal communication, July 24, 2003).

In 1939, Souraya and her husband moved from Lebanon again to teach in Baghdad, Iraq. Feeling empowered by her new job, she told her husband that for the first time, it allowed her to feel the pleasure of work and economic freedom. She boasted mockingly: "we are equal" (Haydar, 1995, p. 45). She was bold, daring, and strongly aware of the subordinate role of women in society.

A TURNING POINT FOR POLITICAL ACTIVISM

In 1940, the Adras returned to Tripoli where Abdallah established the well-known *Ain Ain* soap factory (Haydar, 1995). A few years later, Souraya began her socio-political activism. For a while, Souraya limited her activities to participating in demonstrations demanding the unveiling of women in Tripoli's conservative community. Then, in 1943, Souraya's actions started to take a political flair. She dared not only to step out of her home unveiled, but she also participated in demonstrations against the French occupation. One evening during the Second World War, shaking and startled by gunshots and the smell of death, she stepped outside her home to see what was going on. She was struck by children's corpses scattered in some streets of Tripoli and soldiers savagely stepping on them. Confronted with this calamity, Souraya said:

"I swore never to retreat, never to live my life as an ordinary woman, as a wife and a mother only. Instead, I decided to recruit myself to serve my bigger home that is my nation, even if it starts by solacing the mothers of the child martyrs assassinated that day, as they marched in the demonstration against the occupation."

(B.A., 1978, n.p.)

"After the termination of the Mandate, Souraya gave a speech at the independence ceremony organized by Riad al-Solh on the first of December 1943, at the Hôtel Normandy in honor of Abdul Hamid Karami and the independence leaders."

(A. Adra, personal communication, July 24, 2003)

Souraya's uninterrupted activism started in 1945, when her family moved to Beirut. Afterward, her life was a series of political struggles, seeking to ensure that women would obtain their full political rights. Some of her noteworthy actions include standing on the stairways of the parliament, calling on women to work and not to relinquish their rights, participating in demonstrations against the Israeli assaults, supporting a national reforestation scheme, and participating in several women's demonstrations that protested the high cost of living.

A FERVENT DEFENDER OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Souraya was the founder and President of the League for Women's Rights for more than 30 years during which the League joined the "International Democratic Woman's Organization," and she was chosen as member of its Presidium between 1963 and 1969. She resigned in 1987 because she was too ill to be able to maintain this responsibility. To honor her, members of the League elected her as President for life.

The conferences Souraya participated in increased her visibility among Arab and international audiences, allowing her to rally more support. For example, she represented Lebanon in the following bi-annual conferences: the "Mother's Convention" in Lausanne (1955), the "International Woman's Convention" in Baghdad (1959), the "International Woman's Day" in Copenhagen (1960), the "Helsinki Woman's Convention" (1969), and the "International Peace Conference" in Moscow (1973).

HONORING AND RECOGNITION

In 1970, Souraya and Mary Tabet received the Lenin Medal for Peace during an evening organized by the Higher Soviet Council at the Soviet Embassy in Beirut, which is currently the Russian Embassy. During her speech, Souraya thanked the Higher Soviet Council for its standing with liberation and resistance movements in the Arab World and its support against the oppression of women by patriarchy's constraining traditions and against the Zionist Israeli attacks on Arab nations.

In 1987, Souraya received the Medal of Culture from Prime Minister Salim al-Hoss. Upon thanking the Lebanese authorities, Souraya dedicated her medal to all women who struggled for women's rights and who helped her achieve everything. She then requested that the medal be hung in the main Hall of the League for Women's Rights (A. Adra, personal communication, July 24, 2003).

SOURAYA'S FAREWELL

Souraya passed away in 1995. Shortly after her death, the LAU Alumni Association, the Lebanese Women's Council, the Committee of Mothers in Lebanon, the Committee of Lebanese Women's Rights, and the Lebanese Scout Association organized a gathering at the Irwin Hall at LAU to bid Souraya a final farewell (Al-Safīr, 1995). People came together from Lebanon, Syria, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Cyprus, France, Italy, Iraq, Canada, the United States (U.S.), Spain, and Germany, among others, to pay her tribute. On that occasion, her husband, Abdallah, expressed gratitude with heartfelt words. Emphasizing his pride in Souraya as a wife, mother, and activist, he announced the establishment of a fund of 30 million Lebanese Pounds, in accordance with Souraya's wishes, to support the cause she had served for more than 50 years.

To Abdallah and many, Souraya died a national hero "that glowed in Beirut and now rests in Tripoli" (Haydar, 1995, p. 46).

Souraya highly recognized the role of mothers in the upbringing of virtuous children: *"Lebanese women, whether in Beirut, Tripoli, or elsewhere, should work hand in hand to take care of children and raise their standard of living... It is a sacred and essential duty that must not be delayed... Yes, taking care of the child [...] is caring for ourselves, our future, our dignity, and our status among nations."*

(Adra, 1947, p. 31)

NOTES

1 Seifuddin Khatib (1888-1916) was a Syrian fighter and one of the founders of the Literature Forum in Istanbul.

2 Jamal Pasha (1872-1922) was an Ottoman military leader during World War I.

3 Riad al-Solh (1894-1951) was the first Prime Minister of Lebanon after independence, intermittently from 1943 to 1951.

4 Abdul Hamid Karami (1980-1950) was Prime Minister of Lebanon, serving briefly in 1945.

5 Salim al-Hoss (1929-2024) was the Prime Minister of Lebanon, serving intermittently between 1976 and 2000.

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WRITERS

AFIFAH KARAM

(1883 – 1924)

An ambassador for migrant Syrian women, Afifah strove to elevate their status, encouraging each to tap into her potentials while staying true to her Arab roots.

EARLY LIFE

Born in 1883 in ‘Amshīt, Lebanon, Afifah Karam was one of the most prominent Lebanese migrant women. Her father, Youssef Michael Salih Karam, was from ‘Amshīt and served as a doctor in the Ottoman Army while her mother, Fromina Habib Estephan, was from Baṭrūn.

For several years, she attended a local school where she learned the basics of reading and writing. When she turned thirteen, she moved to a nuns’ school called al-*‘Ā’ila al-Muqaddasa* in Jubayl. At the end of her first year, Afifah’s family announced her engagement to her migrant cousin Karam Yousef Karam,[1] who was on a short visit to Lebanon. They wed on December 17, 1897, and five months later, the couple left for the United States (U.S.) (Mdallalee, 1994). Initially, the couple lived in Louisiana where they worked hard and were able to accumulate a fortune. A few years later, Afifah and her husband moved to New York where she gradually realized her dream of becoming a writer.

LITERARY CONTRIBUTIONS

In 1899, she subscribed to *al-Hudā* journal, one of the most prominent Arabic journals in America at the time. To improve her writing skills, Karam contacted Naoum Moukarzel,[2] the owner of *al-Hudā* journal and asked for help to improve her writing skills. Naoum sent her some books to read and volunteered to correct her Arabic. After years of learning, Afifah was the first woman contributor to al-Hudā (Mdallalee, 1994).

By 1907, Afifah was reputed as a praiseworthy writer and a charitable lady. An announcement in Fatāt al-Sharq informed readers that as a token of her appreciation of the magazine, Afifah donated an amount of money equivalent to six subscriptions, to be distributed among school children from Egypt and Syria. In 1908, Afifah was featured in the *Nisā’ al-Shahīrāt* section of *Fatāt al-Sharq* magazine. It was an appraisal which described her as:

> *“[an] exalted writer, whose breathtaking style spread all over America and filled the orient with the fragrance of her prose. No wonder, the ladies sway in admiration and are proud of her literary style, her concern for women’s wellbeing … For many years, the articles she wrote about selected themes pertaining to the beneficence and development of human beings were continuously published in America’s journals.”*
>
> (*Fatāt al-Sharq*, 1908, p. 121)

Five months later, *Fatāt al-Sharq* published an article by Afifah entitled “*al-mar’a al-Sūriyya al-muhājira*” where she classified Syrian migrant women into three categories: The Wise Virtuous Woman, The Ignorant Goodhearted Woman, and The Ignorant Evil Woman. In her opinion, the first group of women is the most praiseworthy because only such women could seize the benefits of the American lifestyle, becoming more educated and cultured, without forgetting their own traditions. For Afifah, they are the only ones who could develop and become civilized without falling victim to the lure of freedom of American life.

In 1912, around 15 years after she had migrated, and at the age of 29, Afifah bought *al-‘Ālam al-Jadīd* and changed its name to *al-‘Ālam al-Jadīd al-Nisā’iyya*. It was a monthly publication that covered diverse social issues and published articles on home economics, fashion, as well as the status of women in the west and the Arab world. A few copies of the journal are still kept in the American National Museum, as well as the Near East section of the Library of Congress (Mdallalee, 1994).

DEFENDING MIGRANT SYRIAN WOMEN

Unlike newspapers and journals published in Arabic in America at the time, Afifah’s publication was not involved in political dissentions, disputes, and sectarian schisms (Mdallalee, 1994). On the contrary:

> *“Afifah painstakingly defended Arab and Syrian women in their country of immigration, as well as at home. She cried out against the socioeconomic problems that hindered the development of women and urged the Syrian woman to improve her situation at home and in society.”*
>
> (Mdallalee, 1994, p. 31)

As such, in the opening statement of the first issue of the journal, Afifah stated the purpose behind issuing *al-‘Ālam al-Jadīd al-Nisā’iyya:*

> *“Many journals talk about the news of migrant men, events related to them and their deeds. Thus, fellow men at home have been kept informed about migrant men of their country. When it comes to migrant women, however, despite the concern of al-Hudā and several other journals about them, their journey overseas remains mystified. The purpose of al-‘alam al-Jadid al-Nisa’iyya… is to replace the imagined picture women at home have of migrant women, with the real one.”*
>
> (Mdallalee, 1994, p. 31)

Many of Afifah's writings were about the distinctiveness of Syrian immigrant women in the U.S. and social issues that pertain to them. More specifically, according to Mdallalee (1994), Afifah wrote about the suffering of migrants who toiled to adapt their inherited cultures and traditions to the exigencies of the new lifestyle in their country of destination, and the pressures that they had endured. Furthermore, Afifah defended the Syrian girl in the U.S. because the Syrian man associated her with spinsterhood:

"Knowing men to be the knowledgeable, fair and educated persons they are, it is not acceptable that they blame migrant women and accuse them of spinsterhood. This is a heavy accusation. Isn't it enough that the poor girls have to endure a lot for being born to Syrian parents on American territory? The migrant woman is Syrian by birth but has to... adapt to the code of conduct... of the American environment within which she lives. [The migrant Syrian woman] alone has to endure the tension that results from the differences between two cultural systems."

(Mdallalee, 1994, p. 32)

Similarly, Afifah criticized the way Syrian families raised their children and the discrimination against women. In one of her articles, she states: "Boys are despotic and enjoy absolute freedom... whereas girls are weak... poor, with no chance to enjoy their... rights. Such are men and women of our nation. Have you ever heard of a nation that prospered with such men and women?" (Mdallalee, 1994, p. 32). Moreover, Afifah's fluent writing had a nationalistic flare. Her articles clearly reveal not only the extent to which she focused on defending women, but also how proud she was of her origins. She had a special and deep love for her hometown 'Amshīt, and often expressed to people how much she missed it. Afifah further harbored a dream of rejuvenating her homeland through what she believed to be a blend of "civilized culture and inherited authenticity" (Nuwayhid, 1986, p. 218).

Like many Arab journals issued in America toward the beginning of the 20th century, *al-'Ālam al-Jadīd al-Nisā'iyya* did not survive for very long. Although it was well-received, the journal appeared for two years only, being unable to rally enough readership to support it. Some analysts attributed the short-lived publication of the avant-gardist journal due to the prevalent illiteracy among the majority of Syrian and Arab migrant women (Mdallalee, 1994). Afifah did not stop writing after this setback. She went on publishing with the same virtuosity and dedication. For instance, in March 1921, *al-Maqtaṭaf* published an article by Afifah, comparing the writings of May Ziadeh[3] and Malak Hifni Nassif.[4]

A few years later, in 1923, the journal of *al-Marʾa al-Jadīda* published five letters by Afifah, addressed to Syrian women. In the letters, she called upon those who stayed behind to see the reality of their migrant sisters as it really was. She asked them to drop the unfounded negative judgments they had formed and emphasized the rough circumstances migrants undergo along the way. Still, she strove to preserve the Arab cultural heritage and simultaneously support the process of women's liberation and development.

THE PASSING OF AFIFAH

Shortly after the publication of these addresses, Afifah passed away at the age of 40. *Al-'Akhlaq* journal announced her death as the loss of "the Supporter of the Syrian Woman" who "helped a lot, donated a lot, and yet very few ever knew the extent to which she gave support to the poor and to families with limited resources. She demonstrated an exceptional level of courage, quite rare among women all over" (Mdallalee, 1994, p. 32). Afifah died leaving a rich record of charitable acts behind her. In addition to humanitarian support, she sponsored the schooling of several Lebanese orphans and American students of Lebanese origins. She even subsidized a number of orphans to pursue their higher studies and others to travel to America (Mdallalee, 1994).

Afifah also wrote three novels published by *al-Hudā* printing house: *Badī'a wa Fu'ād* (n.d.) in which she advocated a *general* solidarity between men and women; *Fāṭima al-Badawiyya* (n.d.); and *Ghāda 'Amshīt* (n.d.) where she denounced the forced marriage of young girls. She left without awareness of the love and esteem that the people of her home village held for her. On October 7, 1924, the youth of 'Amshīt in association with the Reading Club of 'Amshīt bid her a final farewell in a memorial service during which notables such as Youssef Afendi Karam and Iskandar Afendi Wehbeh gave out touching speeches and eulogies of an exceptional woman from 'Amshīt (*Minerva,* 1924).

Speaking of the need for women to join efforts, Afifah said: *"Let the hands that sway cradles, collaborate for the sake of the love of the country and its service; let them work together to enable its two halves to get to know each other. Let women have the major role in building the nation... on the basis of mutual understanding... starting from a common moral fabric and shared interest in [its people's] welfare."*

(Karam, 1923a, p. 53)

"Afifah Karam was a strong-willed, ambitious woman, whose ideas were a century ahead of her time."

(Ghurayib, 1994, p. 8)

"Your migrant sister left because she was sent by a father or a lazy husband... She fought the battle on her own relying on her tender heart and strong arm, as well as on the strength of a mind shaped by hardships. She brought glory to her country and breed. Men later used the success that these neglected and mistreated women achieved to start businesses they had no role in establishing... As usual, [the returned migrant] did not seek revenge. She did not revolt. On the contrary, she shared her success with the person who placed her on the path of hard labor."

(Karam, 1923b, p. 159)

NOTES

1 Karam Youssef Karam (1872-1945), also known as John Karam, was a Lebanese American landowner and businessman in South Louisiana.

2 Naoum Moukarzel (1864- 1932) was a prominent Lebanese journalist, poet, and thinker. He owned two Arabic newspapers in the United States, *al-ʻAṣr and al-Hudā.*

3 May Ziadeh (1886-1941) was a Palestinian Lebanese writer, poet, and a pioneer of the feminist awakening in the Arab region.

4 Malak Hifni Nassif (1886- 1918) was an Egyptian feminist who advanced intellectual and political discourse on Egyptian women.

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ANBARA SALAM AL-KHALIDI

(1897 – 1986)

A rebel with a cause, Anbara Salam Khalidi dared to unveil in public, established a women's club, and openly challenged traditional shackles. She left behind a legacy of power and courage for upcoming generations.

FAMILY AND EDUCATION

Born in 1897 in Muṣayṭaba, Beirut, Lebanon, Anbara Salam was the daughter of Salim Ali Salam and Kulthum Barbir. She was one of 11 children who grew up in a household, which she described as a typical conservative one:

"I grew up in a house which could be considered a model for other conservative families in our social class. In it, I felt the kindness that existed between my parents, with the supreme power remaining in the hands of the man. This relationship was also built on abiding with religious orders. We would even wake up in the mornings to hear them reciting verses from the Qur'ān. To this I accredit my memorization of many Qur'ānic verses."

(Al-Khalidi, 1978, p. 13)

Anbara's educational journey began at home (Khairallah, 1996). She learned how to read and recite the *Qurʾān* through her daily classes at the residence of *al Shaykha,* who was her first teacher. Describing the brief period she spent as *al-Shaykha's pupil,* she said:

"I remember how excited I was the day I returned from my first lesson to my home in Msaytbeh, waving around a paper with the letters of the alphabet written on it, and repeating joyfully [in Arabic]: 'Alif lā shay'an ʿalayhā wa al-bāʾ nuqṭa min taḥt wa al-tāʾ nuqṭatān min fawq etc.' I spent a few months at the Shaykha's. We would sit on the floor on a mat and in rows, while the Shaykha sat on a pouf facing us... She would read out the word or letter and [the students] would repeat it in loud voices after her. And she would keep by her side something that looked like a ruler, to slap the palm of who would get distracted or would not keep up with the teachings."

(Al-Khalidi, 1978, pp. 26-27)

Anbara had been studying at *al-Shaykha's* home for a few months when her father decided to move her to the *Thamarat al-Iḥsān* School for Girls, a school favored by Beiruti families. Recalling the few years she spent at this school, she wrote in her memoir:

"The school's main principle was that its education did not exceed the basics of reading and basic calculations... As for the teaching procedure, it was not more sophisticated than the teaching of the Shaykha...The overall image, however, was a bit more sophisticated as we sat on chairs and had tables in front of us. We also had exams that were held at the end of every year... Religious teachings also took up a major part of a typical school day, as we would learn the Qur'ān, how to recite it, as well as religious duties... But what I still remember to this day, is how terrifying the Shaykh's teaching method was. I can never forget [the fear I felt when I heard] the sermons about the punishment that awaited the Muslim who did not observe these duties. I was very disturbed by the harshness of the words the Shaykh used..."

(Al-Khalidi, 1978, p. 29)

Then, in 1908, Anbara joined the school of *Les Soeurs de Saint-Joseph* in Beirut. Despite her young age, Anbara appreciated the discipline and order at the school. She was impressed by the modesty of the sisters and the generosity with which they spread love around them.

People in the neighborhood and family members repeatedly criticized Anbara's father for sending his children to a foreign Christian school. As such, a couple of years later, he transferred them to the first school for girls established by *Jamʿiyyat al-Maqāṣid al-Khayrīyya al-Islāmīyya*, which he headed. There, he also faced serious criticism for appointing Julia Tu'mah Dimishqiyah,[1] a Christian by birth, to run it. Anbara spent three years at the school after which she continued her studies at home. During and after World War I, her father made sure she and her siblings had the best access to tutors at home. They were taught French by a French tutor, and science by Father Youssef al-Azhar, a close friend of the family. As for the Arabic language, it was the responsibility of *Shaykh* Abdullah al-Bustani[2] whom Anbara highly respected and appreciated.

THE IRON CAGE: THE VEIL

Around the age of 10, Anbara started to wear the veil. This change of attire put an end to the daily criticisms she had to endure on her way to and from school. Yet, it made her feel like a helpless prisoner entering an "iron gate" (Stephan, 1983, p. 2). In her memoir, she described her frustration, and the mixed effect veiling had on her:

"As soon as I reached the age of ten, men and women on my way to and from school criticized me. Some said: 'Go home and tell your parents to veil you!' or 'Whose daughter are you so that we protest against your parents?' Remarks of this sort made me shiver... I often returned to my mother to wear a veil."

(Al-Khalidi, 1978, p. 37)

"I entered the iron cage when I was 10 years old. I often tripped stepping on the wrap... I did not feel sadness back then because I thought that it is the fate of every girl of my age and that it meant that I had become a young lady... The only thing that upset me is knowing I was no longer able to play with my brothers in the garden... and was no longer allowed to climb the trees and eat my snacks up there. This feeling [of loss] was the first heartache that affected me and became associated with veiling, seclusion, and restrictive rules."

(Al-Khalidi, 1978, p. 38)

At the age of 12, Anbara was just getting used to wearing the veil, when she found out about her relatives' intention to marry her to one of her cousins. Marriage, however, was not on her mind, especially a traditional marriage. Thus, she turned down the proposal.

THE MAKING OF A WRITER

During her teenage years, Anbara had an insatiable passion for reading and was deeply influenced by authors who advocated Arab women's emancipation such as Qasim Amin,[3] Huda Shaarawi,[4] and Ahmad Beyhum.

In addition, she also often listened to her father's conversations with his visitors, standing behind the reception room door, listening, reacting, and reflecting. According to her daughter, Randa Khalidi, she was barely 14 or 15 years old when she and her adolescent friends formed a delegation that went to Damascus to congratulate King Faisal of Iraq5 on his accession to the throne (R. Khalidi, personal communication, October 12, 2001).

Early exposure to patriotism, as well as training at the hands of one of the most memorable Lebanese writers and thinkers, Abdullah al-Bustani, contributed to her becoming a prolific writer at a very young age. She took part in the Arab Renaissance and women's movement, through writing. Randa explains:

"Anbara was, first and foremost, a writer who fought for the liberation of Arab women. She was not a militant who took her calling to the street. She rarely participated in demonstrations and delegations. Nevertheless, she never stopped encouraging women to undertake reasonable deeds to improve their lot, without defying old, deep-rooted traditions."

(personal communication, October 12, 2001)

Around 1913, Anbara published her first article in *al-Mufīd* newspaper under the pseudonym *Fatāt Bayrūt*. In fact, her writing became the tool through which she disseminated her progressive ideas. She especially invited women to be persistent in the struggle for their rights.

THE ARAB WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Along with Ibtihaj Qaddura,[6] Aminah al-Hamzawi, Adila Bayhum,[7] Wadad Mahmassani, and Wahida al-Khalidi,[8] Anbara founded the first association for the promotion of women's education. All the founding members were under 18 and were unable to obtain a license to establish the association. As a result, in August 1914, they asked Najla Bayhum to preside over the association which they named *Jamʿiyyat Yaqaẓat al-Fatāt al-ʿArabiyya*. According to Khalidi (1997), when the club was established, young women could not meet there as they were not allowed to leave the house without a chaperone, but they succeeded in convincing their parents since it was an exclusively female activity.

The activities of the association enabled Anbara and her friends to meet with leaders of the Arab revolution. As the First World War was unfolding and the Arab resistance movement was gaining momentum, Anbara's heart started to beat for one of the most prominent heroes of the revolution led by young Arabs, Abdel Ghani al-Arayssi. Unfortunately, the growing romance was brought to a sudden end when the Ottoman authorities executed him halfway through the war (R. Khalidi, personal communication, October 12, 2001). She was 17 years old when this incident took place:

"Many pleas for clemency were addressed to Jamal Pasha[9] to convince him that pardoning them would enhance his own standing far more than hanging them, but his evil soul and his fanatical chauvinism judged otherwise, and no pleading ever diverted him from his determined course.... I cannot begin to describe my total consternation. It was as if an electric charge had passed through my entire being... as if deafening drums were beating in my ears."

(Al-Khalidi, 1978, p. 104)

Despite this tragedy, Anbara and her colleagues continued to participate in relief work, especially when the war broke out. They were involved in two projects. The first aimed to provide shelter for homeless and starving children. The second, aimed to teach skills to women and girls, provide them with a free meal, employ them, and reward thetalented.

For many years, the club also functioned as a cultural association. It offered literacy, educational, and language classes in English and French, as well as piano lessons. At the same time, poets, writers, and thinkers were invited to give and participate in lectures. Despite the strict code of conduct at the time, men attended those events too. Still, the seating was carefully arranged with men sitting on one side of the room and women on the other.

In time, the audience and activities changed with the evolving political atmosphere. Invitees ranged from Turkish governors and militaries to Arab writers, poets, and prominent social and intellectualfigures.

In 1925, after falling ill and bedridden, Anbara traveled with her sister Rasha and brother Saeb Salam,[10] to England to join their father. For around two years, Anbara was absent from the local scene of socio-cultural activities. Nevertheless, the journey in England marked Anbara and broadened her horizon, especially in relation to personal freedoms. As she stated:

"The thing that attracted my attention most was the freedom that British girls enjoyed and of which I was deprived... The freedom of movement that I enjoyed just like other human beings made me feel happy. At the same time, however, I felt more miserable, because of the captivity girls in my country had to endure."

(Al-Khalidi, 1978, pp. 142-143)

Anbara brought back with her to Lebanon the freedom she had enjoyed in England. To her, the veil became a major obstacle to women's emancipation (Al-Sayyed, 1986), and it was not long after she returned that she took the forbidden step that Huda Shaarawi pioneered: she dared to unveil. Anbara's daring step triggered a violent reaction in the community. She and her family were criticized and harassed by conservatives around them for a long time. Along with public insult, Anbara recalled in her memoir that flyers were distributed, unveiled women walking in the streets were sprayed with acid, and veils were torn with razors. Aggressors even attacked veiled women when the veils "did not conform to their petrified notion of what a veil should be" (Al-Khalidi, 1978, p. 149). Due to this commotion, Anbara had to stay at home for some time. When the uproar started to abate, she went on wearing the veil in conservative areas and took it off when she was indoors, at home, or in more tolerant public spaces (Abi Daher, 1986).

ANBARA GOES INTO MATRIMONY

On August 9, 1929, Anbara Salam got married to Ahmad Samih Al-Khalidi[11] who had come all the way from Jerusalem to meet her. Referring to him, she asserts that he "made you feel you were in the presence of a frank, intelligent, and scholarly individual. His friends called him 'Scholarship,' while the British [in Palestine] described him as a 'mine of information'" (Al-Khalidi, 1978, p. 174). Despite family and social duties, they spent numerous hours reading, writing, and translating books and articles.

Unlike her husband, who never stopped writing, her literary output was sporadic. Still, she remained aware of literary, political, and women-related events and developments in Lebanon and other Arab countries. At the same time, Anbara took part in the resistance movement against the British Mandate and the sweep of the Zionist project. Her participation, however, remained peaceful. In her memoir, she mentioned only one demonstration that she participated in, shortly after she settled in Jerusalem in 1929. The bulk of her contribution was in the form of social work, and she mainly took part in actions that supported her husband in his efforts to safeguard Palestine. She helped establish and run the Arab Orphans Committee in *Dayr ʿAmr* Technical Institute, as well as a school in the village of al-Ḥanniyya in Southern Lebanon. Her husband worked hard to set up these institutions to help families of victims of the ongoing British and Zionist assaults.

A LEBANESE HOMECOMING

The Al-Khalidi family remained in Palestine until April 1948, when they were forced to leave their home. They sought refuge in Lebanon where, shortly after they settled, Ahmad passed away before he turned 55 years old. His death was sudden, and he died before he could set up the boarding school and a medical center for the children of Palestinian refugees in the north of Lebanon, which he intended to be similar to the one he had set up in the south of the country. Unfortunately, Anbara did not have the chance to bid her life partner and friend farewell; she was in England with her son Tarif who was preparing to join school there and continue his studies. Anbara's life after the death of her husband was never the same. She chose to be productive but retreated from the active social life she used to have. Amid her solitude and quietness, she dedicated herself to writing and taking care of her family.

Along with articles published in journals like al-*Marʾa al-Jadīda, al-Mufīd, Dawḥat al-Mīmās,* and Ṣawt al-Marʾa, she translated Homer's Illiad and Virgil's Aeneid, after having translated The Odessey years before, when she was still living in Palestine.

Anbara passed away in 1986, leaving behind her memoirs *Jawla fī al-Dhikrīyāt bayna Lubnān wa Filasṭīn* in which her entire life and the details of its unfolding remain preserved. Thus, Kamal Salibi[12] suggests the following:

"From now on, neither the history of Beirut in modern times, nor that of women's renaissance in the modern Arab World can be written without referring to and relying on Sitt Anbara's memoirs."

(Al-Khalidi, 1978, p. 7)

Anbara was 13 years old, when her teacher Julia Tu'mah Dimashqiyah invited her to attend a literary evening, during which Julia was supposed to give a speech. Julia assured her that she would find her an appropriate seat where no one would see her. When they were getting ready to descend from the carriage, they heard a man say:

"Have we reached this level of heedlessness?! Look, today Muslim girls take part in nocturnal events at clubs, and this is the daughter of Abou Ali Salam. She is one of those who go to mixed clubs… I swear I cried all night… The next day the headline in the Ababīl newspaper was titled 'Muslim Girls in Nocturnal Clubs.'"

(Al-Khalidi, 1978, p. 69)

In 1912, Anbara, her parents, and her sister traveled to Egypt. This was meant to be a relaxing trip, especially for Anbara whose health had been weakened by too many hours spent reading and studying. During this trip, Anbara had the opportunity to attend the ceremony of mounting the statue of a political figure, Mustafa Kamil Pasha.[13] Recalling that day, she stated in her memoirs:

"We attended the vast celebration and popular demonstrations which accompanied the erection of the statue. I liked the outward appearance of Egyptian women and felt they were more liberated than we were, for they at least could see the world with their eyes unveiled, whereas we could only see the world through a black curtain."

(Al-Khalidi, 1978, p. 64)

NOTES

1 Julia Tu'mah Dimashqiyah (1954-1882) was a Lebanese educator and journalist.

2 Abdullah al-Bustani (1854-1930) was a Lebanese linguist.

3 Qasim Amin (1863-1908) was an Egyptian jurist, Islamic Modernist, and the Father of Egyptian Feminism.

4 Huda Shaarawi (1879-1947) was an Egyptian nationalist and women's rights activist.

5 King Faisal of Iraq (1885-1933) was the third son of Hussein Bin Ali. He helped set up an Arab government in Syria and ruled it from March 1920 until he was expelled by the French in July 1920.

6 Ibtihaj Qaddura (1893–1967) was a Lebanese feminist and political activist.

7 Adila Bayhum (1900-1975) was a Syrian-Lebanese feminist, independence activist, and philanthropist.

8 Wahida al-Khalidi (dates unknown) was a pioneering Iraqi Palestinian activist and the first President of the Arab Women's Executive Committee.

9 Jamal Pasha (1872-1922) was an Ottoman military leader during World War I.

10 Saeb Salam (1905-2000) was Prime Minister of Lebanon, serving intermittently between 1952 and 1973. Ahmad Samih al-Kalidi (1896-1951) was a Palestinian educator, writer, and former principal of the Arab College and Deputy Director of education in Palestine during the British Mandate.

12 Kamal Salibi (1929-2011) was a Lebanese historian and professor.

13 Mustafa Kamil Pasha (1874-1908) was an Egyptian lawyer, journalist, and national activist.

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LABIBA HASHIM

(1882 – 1952)

Labiba Hashim is remembered as the one who strived to promote women's literacy, education, and awareness. As a writer, she deviated from the conventional and established her mark in the literary field.

EARLY AMBITIONS

Born in 1882 in Beirut, Labiba Hashim's childhood and upbringing seem to be clouded by unconfirmed versions of where she was raised and which schools she attended (Al-Khatib, 1984). Emily Fares Ibrahim[1] (1961) claimed that Labiba was raised in Beirut where she received her schooling at *Madrasat Rāhibāt al-Maḥabba* and later attended the American University of Beirut (AUB). It is also said that in 1890 she moved with her family to Egypt. There, Labiba was tutored by *Shaykh* Ibrahim al-Yazigi[2] who was the first person to acknowledge her flair for writing and who encouraged her to pursue a career in it. Thus, at only 18, Labiba took al-Yazigi's advice to heart and established the magazine *Fatāt al-Sharq* (1906-1939), one of the first women's magazines in the Arab world. Although this magazine did not tackle political issues, its owner did not refrain from expressing her political views openly. After all, Labiba repeatedly proclaimed that it pained her to see that most publications of the time catered to the interests of certain groups and parties rather than to the public at large (Al-Khatib, 1984).

A CAREER

The new responsibilities that accompanied the launching of *Fatāt al-Sharq* did not deter Labiba from pursuing her education further. Labiba continued to study at the Women's Center at the Egyptian University (Ibrahim, 1961). She also found time to organize lectures and presentations both in Egypt and abroad. Furthermore, her social life was quite active, particularly with key names from the literary scene of that time. Labiba's friends included prominent literary figures such as Warda al-Yazigi,[3] Afifa Karam,[4] Jurji Baz,[5] and others (Al-Khatib, 1984).

Sometime during her career, Labiba traveled to Chile where she established the *East-West Magazine*. A year later, she returned to Egypt to resume the management of her first magazine (Al-Khatib, 1984). However, Labiba's contributions and writings were not restricted to the magazines she edited. She also wrote short stories and translated articles from French for other journals such as *al-Ḍiyā'*, which was owned by *Shaykh* al-Yazigi (Dayeh, 2007). Her short stories were successful in that they sought to surprise the reader with intricate plots charged with much suspense. Despite this, Labiba's subjects remained rooted in the realities of her daily life (Kallas, 1996).

She wrote novels which found their inspiration in ancient and modern times (Zeidan, 1995). Her first novel *Qalb al-Rajul* (1907) has been described as remarkably advanced in the genre of women's fiction. Focusing on a love affair between a Christian and a Druze, Labiba delved deep into her characters' psychological workings without resorting to "moral preaching" (Zeidan, 1995). In this sense, Labiba was quite unlike her predecessors. In her second novella, *Shīrīn* (1907), Labiba found inspiration in Persian history and thus wrote a story whose style saw a Western influence and journalistic feel.

She excelled in writing and succeeded in urging other women to study, write, and publish. Her steadfast enthusiasm for the eradication of all forms of illiteracy and the promotion of literature led her to establish one of the first literary salons solely for women in the hope of improving their status in the region. Her contribution to the Lebanese literary scene cannot be underestimated.

A MYSTERIOUS PERSONAL LIFE

Although Labiba's contributions to the literary field of that time have been highly acknowledged, little has been told of the kind of woman she was. Labiba's personality and personal life seem to be shrouded in mystery.

> Labiba was one of the earliest female writers whose work is said to have tackled controversial issues, in as much as the prevailing conditions permitted, and to have adopted a relatively different style from that of her female predecessors.
>
> (Ibrahim, 1961)

Labiba believed in the power of literature, whether books or quotidian newspaper articles, in bringing about fundamental societal change, revolutionizing tradition, and reconciling differences. As she described:

"It is no secret that newspapers, regardless of their types, wield influence over the minds of readers as they are tasked with reforming societal affairs and nurturing peoples' aspirations, because they were designed to be the educators of society, the orators of its assemblies, the leaders to goodness and reform, and the guides toward general wellbeing."

(*Al-Ḍiyā'*, 1990, p. 428)

NOTES

1 Emily Fares Ibrahim (1914-2011) was a Lebanese-American writer, poet, feminist, and the first woman to ever run for Parliament in 1953.

2 Ibrahim al-Yazigi (1847-1906) was a Lebanese philosopher, poet, and journalist.

3 Warda al-Yazigi (1838-1924) was a Lebanese poet and pioneer of women's writing.

4 Afifa Karam (1883-1924) was an American-Lebanese writer, journalist, and translator.

5 Jurji Baz (1881-1959) was a prominent 20th century Lebanese renaissance figure, writer, historian, and journalist.

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NADIA TUENI

(1935 – 1983)

Nadia Tueni painted the souls of readers with words of love and wisdom. To this day, the strokes of her pen continue to reverberate in the hearts and minds of poets and artists.

FAMILY AND EDUCATION

Born in 1935 in Baʿqālīn, Lebanon, Nadia Tueni was raised in a bilingual home. Her father, Mohammad Ali Hamade[1] was a Lebanese Druze diplomat and journalist, and her mother, Amélie Jeanne Marguerite Malaquin, was from Auvergne, France.

She received her education in Beirut, at the Sisters of Besançon, and then at the *Mission Laique Française*. As a result of her father being appointed General Consul to Paris, her family moved to France between 1946 and 1947, where she spent two years at the Irish Mary Mount School. From 1947 to 1949, she returned to Beirut to the *Lycée Français,* only to leave again in 1952, for Athens, where she attended the French Academy of Athens (Nuwayhid, 1986).

Upon her final return to Beirut, she started studying law at the Saint Joseph University of Beirut (USJ) but interrupted her studies in 1954 when she married Ghassan Tueni[2] (Nuwayhid, 1986). By uniting with Ghassan, a Greek-Orthodox, Nadia dismissed all religious barriers, usually very prevalent in a strongly confessional society. As her husband asserted,

"I was a young Greek Orthodox politician and she was the daughter of a Druze diplomat; people were bound to see our union as defiant, but nothing could change our minds" (G. Tueni, personal communication, May 12, 2004).

Nadia and Ghassan moved to Rās Kafrā, Nabaṭiyya, where they built a strong foundation for their family. Her son, Gebran Tueni, remembered his mother's resilience and steadfastness in face of adversity:

"For me, Nadia Tueni will always be remembered as a source of all affection and power. Even though she suffered, and Nadia Tueni did suffer in her life, she kept a firm grip on her pain, never letting it affect others or how she treated them. She bore her pain and through it, carried the whole family's pain."

(personal communication, n.d.)

In 1963, Nadia faced ultimate pain with the loss of her daughter, Nayla, to cancer at eight years old. Gebran, on this sorrowful event, asserted that "My mother always taught us to face problems, to look them in the eye. That's how she faced her problems; I'm a lot like her" (personal communication, n.d.).

WRITING POEMS: A REMEDY FOR PAIN

To deal with her tragic loss, Nadia resorted to poetry. The product of this emotional trauma was her first collection of poems, *Les Textes Blonds (Al-Nahār,* 1983), only four months after her daughter's death. She later admitted that this publication was a "youthful mistake" (Khairallah, 1996, p. 228), a very personal and spontaneous reaction to her loss, which thrusted her into the world of poetry and artistic creativity.

In 1965, Nadia was diagnosed with cancer, and her pain and fear of death seemingly poured into poetry. During her stay in Paris, she published her second book – *l' Âge d' Écume* in 1966 which received the Said Akl Prize, a major literary distinction granted by a Lebanese jury – and a third entitled *Juin et Les Mécréantes* in 1968. The former was published by the French *Éditions Seghers*, which allowed her to gain recognition as a francophone author.

Teetering into the world of poetry, Nadia came to forge for herself a major place among the celebrated Lebanese poets. She turned the sufferings of her private life and of her homeland into a cry of the soul that has come to mark the Lebanese modern poetry forever. This gained her the prestigious *Prix de l'Académie Française* for her publication, *Poèmes pour une Histoire,* in 1973.

Back in Beirut, Nadia became an active journalist, particularly at *al-Nahār* where she assumed the responsibility of covering women's activities. She also became a literary editor at *Le Jour*, a leading French-speaking newspaper, and wrote for various Arab and French publications, including the poetry magazine *Shiʿr.* She gave lectures and took part in several literary conferences in Lebanon and abroad. This series of articles and conferences formed her collection of prose. In addition, she wrote a script in Arabic for a musical comedy, *Faramane,* which was performed at the Baalbek Festival.

THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR: A TURNING POINT FOR NADIA'S WRITING

Along with some of the greatest modern Arab and Lebanese poets, such as Ounsi al-Hajj,[3] Talal Haydar,[4] and Yusuf al-Khal,[5] Nadia contributed to creating one of the most creative literary circles of Beirut. However, this was all cut short when the civil war broke out in Lebanon. Once again, pain flowed through her words as she reproduced the tragedy of Lebanon (*Al-Safīr,* 1980). Accordingly, she issued two new writing series: *20 Poèmes Pour un-Amour* in 1978, and *Archives Sentimentales d'une Guerre au Liban* in 1982.

NADIA'S DEATH

Even though her suffering is clearly mirrored in her poetry, Nadia always managed to keep up a brave image within her family and in her social life. According to Gebran:

"She was very Druze, as she believed that in the Druze religion, there was a philosophy in life that helps man overcome his problems. Until the last moment in her life, she always had a smile on her face. It was really an achievement that she was able to take care of us, despite all the problems we went through, starting with her illness, her grief, the war, and the political problems with my father. Despite all this, she managed to always keep a smile, and that is the most important thing for a child, to see his mother smiling all the time."

(G. Tueni, personal communication, n.d.)

In June 1983, Nadia died in New York from cancer, after struggling for more than 20 years. She often used to say that her astrological sign, Cancer, was to mark her career and destiny. For Nadia, "poetry... became a means of self-searching, a way to probe deep into her soul" (Khairallah, 1996, p. 229).

Nadia Tueni once said, *"I can lock myself in a bare and dark room [...] and write the best poems and the most tender verses."*

(Sokhn, 1974, p. 106)

Nadia's short life was as rich in exchanges and travels as it was in personal losses. Described by all the people who knew her closely as being extremely sensitive, she vented her pain in poetry, *"which came as small mirrors reflecting her dreams, nightmares, fears, and affections. It is a personal cry and wound, but it is alive, not only in its dynamism that lightens it up, but because it touched each and every one of us."*

(*Al-Nahār al-ʿArabī wa al-Duwalī*, 1983, para. 8)

Nadia stated, "*When I discovered poetry three years ago, I was like a sick person discovering penicillin.*"

(*Al-Nahār al-ʿArabī wa al-Duwalī*, 1983, para. 30)

A eulogy of Nadia Tueni described her as *"an authentic and sincere poet, a warm and profound voice, a unique call in Lebanese poetry, singing with the spirit of children, birds, night, sea, and winds."*

(*Al-Nahār al-ʿArabī wa al-Duwalī*, 1983, para. 18).

NOTES

1 Mohammad Ali Hamade (1907-1987) was a Lebanese diplomat, politician, and journalist.

2 Ghassan Tueni (1926-2012) was a Lebanese politician, diplomat, journalist, and one of the family owners of al-Nahār newspaper.

3 Ounsi al-Hajj (1937-2014) was a Lebanese journalist and poet.

4 Talal Haydar (1937) is a Lebanese poet.

5 Yusuf al-Khal (1917-1987) was a Lebanese-Syrian journalist and poet.

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NAZIRA ZEINEDDINE

(1908-1976)

While Nazira Zeineddine's revolutionary discourse on women and religion sparked public condemnation and anger, she remained a strong voice that could not be curbed. The force and impact of her ideas upset conservatives and shaped new minds.

EARLY LIFE

Born in 1908 in ʿAyn Qānī, Lebanon, Nazira belonged to an erudite and influential Druze family that provided her with the best opportunities in life. Her father, *Shaykh* Saeed Zeineddine, was a chief judge who instigated his daughter's flair for reason and analysis. While Nazira's son, Arij Al-Halabi, recalled little about his mother, who passed away when he was 12, he can certainly vouch that his grandparents' home was the most "beautiful" and perhaps affluent house in the village (personal communication, December 20, 2003).

When Nazira was still young, the family moved to Beirut where she attended the Nazarene School and then *Al-Kulliyya al-ʿAlmāniyya,* receiving her French and Lebanese Baccalaureates. Later, she enrolled at the American University of Beirut (AUB) and majored in English (Ibrahim, 1966). It is said that she loved poetry and wrote some poems herself; however, none were published. After graduation, she became a teacher.

She is often identified as the first Lebanese

woman to discard the veil in public. Most notably, she was the first woman to speak up, criticize, and argue that veiling should not be practiced and that a piece of textile would not protect a woman's honor *(Ṣawt lil-Marʾa, n.d.).* At only 20 years old, she "initiated one of the most dramatic and intense intellectual debates in the history of modern Arab women" (Zeidan, 1995, p. 26). She was a woman who argued critically and logically; it was hard not to be swayed by her ideas.

UNVEILING

The fight and uproar against Nazira erupted with the publication of her book *Al-Sufūr wa al-Ḥijāb: Muḥāḍarāt wa Naẓarāt, Marmāhā Taḥrīr al-Marʾa wa al-Tajaddud al-Ijtimāʿī fī al-ʿĀlam* al-Islāmī (1927). It tackled the issue of the veil from a religious, intellectual, and social vantage point, and tried to question the arguments of those who promoted wearing it. By referring to Qurʾānic verses and the Prophet's hadith, she attempted to show that there is almost nothing in the teachings and doctrine of Islam that mandates women's subordination, marginalization, or exclusion in any way (Al-Sayegh, 2012). She always reiterated that the Prophet's message was in essence to respect women's dignity. Similarly, she claimed that the veil was a custom inherited from pagan times – one that hindered women's advancement and progress while triggering social corruption. For Nazira, the veil prevented nations from fulfilling their potentials to "compete, overcome [obstacles], and excel" (Zeidan, 1995, p. 27).

Through her criticism of the veil, Nazira employed reason and reason alone. “In the sayings of our fathers and ancestors there is both right and wrong,” she said, “there is no way to distinguish between the two except through thinking and free investigation” (Zeidan, 1995, p. 28). Nevertheless, Nazira’s adversaries did not hail the clear logic reflected in her arguments. Religious figures and conservatives alike raged against her, denouncing the book and accused her of being a fake writer who must have hired someone to ghost-write it. Others claimed her father must have written the book or a team of religious scholars and *Shaykhs* from various groups and sects (Zeidan, 1995). After all, they could not understand how a young woman could deploy such comprehensive documentation of Islam’s primary source, the *Qurʾān*.

Indeed, in an article published in 1988, Al-Rifai (1988) recalled that the world turned upside down with the publication of the book, stressing that pamphlets were distributed, poetry was written, and letters were sent denouncing Nazira’s ideas. Several attempts were also made to take her life (Nuwayhid, 1986). They even went so far as to allege she was a spy for the French government.

NAZIRA FACING THE STORM

Interestingly, Nazira was not afraid to admit that her father had read the first draft of the book in addition to a Shaykh who, in turn, gave her some advice as to how to improve the quality of her argument (Zeidan, 1995). It is also worth noting that Nazira did not waver amid threats and rejection. On the contrary, the young woman maintained her stance toward the veil. She sent letters explaining her case to prominent French figures, but she did not succumb to the pressure around her (A. Al-Halabi, personal communication, December 20, 2023). Then, Nazira published her second book in which she responded to her critics and adversaries. The book entitled *Al-Fatāt wa al-Shuyūkh Naẓarāt wa Munāẓarāt fī al-Sufūr wa al-Ḥijāb* also employed logic and reason to challenge those who claimed it was a work of fiction. It was divided into several sections, which included refutations against those who attacked her ideas and complimentary reviews of the book.

ADIEU TO WRITING

As much as Nazira enjoyed writing, she somehow gave it up, eventually. Her marriage to Shafiq al-Halabi brought an end to her writing and teaching career. According to Arij, Nazira remained true to her marriage vows by devoting her life to taking care of her husband and three sons (personal communication, December 20, 2003). Amidst her husband’s busy and demanding life, there was no time to write.

After all, when Nazira married Shafiq he had already stepped along the path of distinction and success, holding notable positions such as Head of the Court of *Tamyīz,* and Mayor of Beirut (Nuwayhid, 1986). He was a very strong and authoritarian man with multiple responsibilities, so much so that he did not even have the time to enjoy the little things in life, such as going to the movies or shopping with his wife and children. Consequently, the bulk of looking after family matters fell on Nazira’s shoulders, a task which she wholeheartedly performed (A. Al-Halabi, personal communication, December 20, 2003).

DISAPPOINTMENT AND WISTFULNESS

According to Arij, because his mother loved to write, she was, deep down, disappointed at not continuing to do so for the rest of her life: “My mother locked the door on everything her dad had enriched within her and decided to dedicate herself to her family” (personal communication, December 20, 2003). Although Arij attributed his mother’s stagnant post-marriage writing period to family responsibilities, he also adds that his father favored this.

Whatever the reasons behind Nazira’s resignation from writing, one reality remains indisputable; Nazira had rocked the foundations of her society with her contentious ideas and views. Additionally, no matter the attacks against her, she sustained her beliefs. Yet, years later, she admitted that if she had known that calling for women’s freedom would bring us to such a point where women would behave so

indecently, then she “would rather [her] hand had become paralyzed” *(Al-Amānī,* 1980, pp. 38-39). In her old age, Nazira was disappointed at what she considered a downward spiral of women’s liberation. Still, she remained honest and courageous enough to openly condemn the attitude of many women who, she thought, were inappropriately exercising the rights that she and many others had struggled to obtain.

In 1976, Nazira passed away, leaving behind a memory and an intellectual heritage that many will continue to reflect upon.

Nazira’s book contained an inherent criticism and distrust of religious figures who misinterpret the teachings of Islam and who do not rely on science:

“When I embarked upon preparing my defense of women, I looked into the utterances of interpreters and jurisprudents concerning the subject, and I did not find among them an exclusive unanimity that I could follow on any matter. Rather, whenever I came across a saying, I found other sayings which opposed or contradicted it.”

(Zeidan, 1995, p. 28)

For Nazira, the veil/niqab is an insult to both men and women:

“If wearing the veil, sadly, is seen as a sign of a woman’s inability to protect herself without it, then it is also a sign that a man… cannot be trusted, and it is better for a woman to escape from him.”

(Zeineddine, 1928, p. 117)

SALMA SAYEGH

(1890-1953)

Until her last breath, Salma Sayegh displayed an unwavering commitment to the feminist movement in Lebanon and the Arab world. She fervently led the fight for women's rights through writing and activism.

PERSONAL LIFE

Born in 1890 in Beirut, Lebanon, Salma Sayegh was the 14th child of a relatively wealthy family who originally came from Wādī al-Taym, Ḥāṣbayā. At a very young age, she lost her mother to whom she was greatly attached. The Sayegh family was a scholarly one and from a young age, little Salma demonstrated remarkable intelligence and a great interest in knowledge.

In 1895, she attended the English School of Muṣayṭaba which was run by the very famous educationalist Hanne. In 1898, she joined Zahrat al-Ihsan where she completed her education and perfected her Arabic language under the supervision of Shaykh Ibrahim al-Mounzer (Khairallah, 1996). Later, she joined the French Medical College to study dentistry.

In 1911, she married Dr. Farid Kassab with whom she had two children: a daughter, Aida Kassab, the widow of Salah Labaki[1] (Khairallah, 1996), and a son, George Kassab, who passed away at a very young age.

THE LITERARY WOMAN AND THE EDUCATOR

Many remember Salma as a charming woman, a wonderful mother, and a ferocious fighter for human rights, but very few know that this talented literary woman began her career as a journalist at a young age under the false name of Salwa (Baz, 1954). She wrote many articles in the *Bayrak* newspaper against the Ottoman's rule and French Mandate. Following Lebanon's independence, she directed her attention toward reforming the education system and the adoption of the Arabic language in official exams.

Salma contributed to many journals including *Ṣawt al-Marʾa, al- Ḥasnāʾ, Minerva, al- Fajr, al-Khuḍr, al- Marʾa, al- Ḥayat, al- Barq, al- Sāʾiḥ, al-Sharq, Lisān al-Ḥāl,* and many others. She took immense pride in the popularity of these journals (Sayegh, 1923), believing that women's voices should be amplified and well-heard.

Al-Nasamāt, a collection of literary and social articles by Salma collected by Jurji Baz[2] in 1962, is a great testimonial to her talent. This book is a plea for freedom, independence, and social justice *(Al-*

Khuḍr, 1923). In it, she demonstrated her immense love for her country; she wrote about the social, rural, and familial life in Lebanon and beautifully described its charming nature. She also dedicated an important part of her book to express her adoration for her daughter.

In addition to being the first Lebanese woman to be hired in the French High Commission, Salma was also a great educator. She taught the Arabic language at *Zahrat al-Iḥsān* the Young Girls College, and the Junior Girls College, which is currently the Lebanese American University (LAU).

A DEVOTION TO THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT

Salma played an important role in the Lebanese women's rights movement. She was very interested and involved in women's social issues, believing that the stability and continuity of a nation rested on the shoulders of its mothers. She considered that if women had good sons and daughters, then the nation would have good servants.

She was the first person to ever demand the abolition of prostitution, to fight for equal salaries for men and women and for better hygiene in the prisons of Lebanon. Furthermore, she led many campaigns against social injustice when Michel Zaccour[3] was Minister of Interior.

She fought endlessly to improve the lives of all Lebanese women and went as far as asking the French High Commissioner to personally visit the women's prisons where more than 50 women shared the same cell. Many of her efforts were crowned with success and, because of her, the lives of women prisoners became better.

Together with other women including Labiba Tabit, Khartum and Ibtihaj Qaddura,[4] Najla Kfoury, Anbara Salam Khalidi,[5] and others, Salma founded the Society for Women's Renaissance to lobby for gender equality and promote Lebanon's economy by supporting small businesses. For example, they organized exhibitions for Lebanese products such as textiles. Through several initiatives, Salma fought endlessly to improve the lives of all Lebanese citizens and to spread the notions of justice, charity, decency, and kindness.

WORLD WAR ONE

During the first World War, Lebanon suffered some of its darkest days. In the middle of all the atrocities and disasters, Salma remained lucid and sane. She passionately threw herself into the torment surrounding her, bringing assistance and relief to the starving population, the abandoned, and the sick. In collaboration with Henri Misk, she founded a hospice in Ghazīr, Jubayl, where thousands of starving children found refuge and escaped certain death. She also took charge of the Orphanage of Ghazīr that was established by Jamal Pasha[6] (Khairallah, 1996).

TRAVELS AND JOURNEYS

Deeply attracted to different cultures and countries, Salma dreamed of journeying to faraway lands. She took numerous trips to Egypt, Turkey, France, and England. Finally, in 1939, she went to Brazil in search of her brother. However, due to World War II, she remained in Brazil for 10 years where she studied Portuguese and joined *Al-ʿUṣba al-Andalusiyya* in Sao Paulo.

Her book, Images and Memories, was published in Brazil and brought her worldwide fame. On this occasion, the Society of Literary People in Brazil gave a grand reception attended by 5,000 people. Greatly moved, Salma gave a speech and expressed her gratitude to everyone present, specifically urging the Lebanese not to forget their homeland and think of their blessed country as they do of their own mothers.

A DIMMED LIGHT

It is impossible to forget the many services that Salma offered to the social and literary worlds in Lebanon: "Her life was a continuous series of devoted struggles in the service of the Arabic language, refining and expressing it in a pure and elegant literature that portrayed a contemporary feminist perspective" (*Ṣawt al-Marʾa*, 1953, p. 47). In memory and recognition of Salma, the Ministry of Education named one of its official schools in Achrafieh, Beirut, after her. This remains but a small token of appreciation to a great woman, mother, writer, educator, journalist, feminist, and reformer. She will always be remembered as a Lebanese literary woman, who was one of those passionate pioneers of *al-Nahḍa* era in Lebanon, entirely devoted to her country's cause and the feminist movement.

"Away from the city and its turbulence, I fled to the hilltops of Ḥarīṣā where stands the mother of the Naazarene with open arms, as if repeating the call of her son: come to me, all ye that are tired and I shall give you rest."

(Ghurayib, 1985, p. 5)

As Salma asserted in one of her speeches, *"Those revolutions in which women take the lead before men are the true revolutions that I advocate for."*

(Sayegh, 1911, p. 299)

Salma's writings *"reflect a highly emotional nature, deeply conscious of human suffering, strongly moved by the sight of misery, ready to denounce all forms of social injustice, such as the abuse of women and children, the ill-treatment of prisoners, handicapped people, refugees and foundlings."*

(Ghurayib, 1985, p. 5)

"Anyone who says that women's talents die in the East is mistaken."

(Sayegh, 1924, p. 430)

NOTES

1 Salah Labaki (1906-1955) was a Lebanese poet.

2 Jurji Baz (1881-1959) was a prominent 20th century Lebanese renaissance figure, writer, historian, and journalist.

3 Michel Zaccour (1896-1937) was a Lebanese journalist, politician, and former Minister of Interior.

4 Ibtihaj Qaddura (1893–1967) was a Lebanese feminist and political activist.

5 Anbara Salam Khalidi (1897-1986) was a Lebanese feminist, translator, and writer.

6 Jamal Pasha (1872-1922) was an Ottoman military leader during World War I.

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WARDA AL-YAZIGI

(1838-1924)

As the pioneer of classical Arabic poetry, Warda al-Yazigi left behind a remarkable collection of literary achievements. Although enigmatic in nature, her poems are known to burst with a cascade of sorrowful emotions.

EARLY LIFE

Born in 1838 in Kfarshima, Lebanon, Warda al-Yazigi was the daughter of a renowned figure in Arabic literature, Nasif al-Yazigi.1 When she was two years old, her family moved to Beirut where she later attended the newly opened American Missionary School. Her flair for writing was nurtured at an early age by her erudite family, defying social norms long before women were allowed to write.

At the age of 12, Warda's father began tutoring her in the fundamentals of the Arabic language and prosody. Even more, when he was away from home, he would send his daughter letters in the form of poetic verses. He also assigned her the task of responding to his literary friends with poetry on his behalf (Zeidan, 1995). Thus, it is no surprise that at thirteen, Warda was already entering the world of poetry and began to teach at one of the city's schools. In addition, despite her fascination and attempts to write poetry, Warda still experienced life at home like any other young girl of that time. With 12 children in the house, Warda was the fourth child and contributed largely to caring for her siblings (Ziade, 1980).

Warda was one of the literary pioneers who clung to her traditions and roots and who criticized women for attempting to westernize their image (Khairallah, 1996). She believed that Arab women should observe the accomplishments of Westerners in the fields of knowledge, such as the sciences and humanities, rather than imitate their outer physical appearance. As she argued:

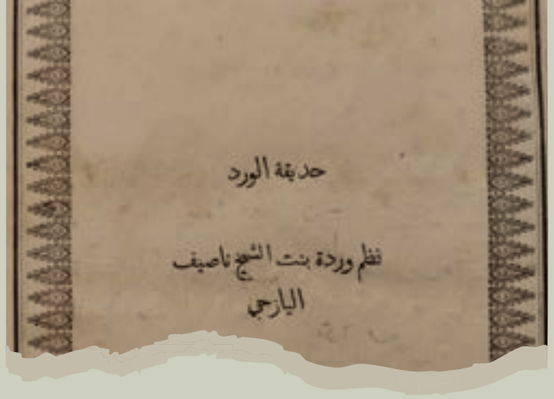
"Beyond any doubt, if the women of our age were concerned with literary and intellectual pursuits instead of idling away their time on extravagance and adornments, as well as empty imitations and traditions, there would rise from among them geniuses who would achieve honorable mention and great pride, and whose names would be immortalized in the records of time."

(Al-Yazigi, 1906, p. 454)

In 1866, Warda married Francis Chamoun but continued to use her maiden name throughout her life. A year later, Warda published her first and only collection of poetry entitled Ḥadīqat al-Ward which were compiled with newer poems in two other editions that appeared years later (Ziade, 1980). According to Warda's son-in-law George Baz, *Ḥadīqat al-Ward* was the only anthology to be reprinted three times during that era by any poet (Ziade, 1980).

A CONTROVERSIAL POET

Warda focused on two forms of poetry: eulogy and elegy (Maskouni, 1946). Regarding the latter, Warda seems to have written elegies to eminent Ottomans, such as the sister of Sultan Abdul-Hamid II[2] (Zeidan, 1995). As for the former, Warda was famous for heartrending verses (Maskouni, 1946) in which she mourned the death of her father, brothers, son, and daughter. Warda was no stranger to death and sorrow. Through her poetry, she tried to transcend the repeated tragedies that struck her by attempting to "draw lessons from the phenomenon of death" (Zeidan, 1995, p. 56). Nevertheless, it is precisely this traditional approach to composing verses that critics have found insufficient. For instance, Warda's inability to break free of the aesthetic practices of male poets caused her poetry to lack individuality and personal sentiment (Zeidan, 1995). Others like Hatem (2003), argued that while Warda followed the track of male poets, her contribution to the literary scene at the time did not stop there. She also wrote critical articles in journals such as *Lisān al-Ḥāl, al-Ajyāl, Fatāt al-Sharq,* and *al-Ḍiyāʾ* which was run by her brother, Shaykh Ibrahim al-Yazigi[3] (Nuwayhid, 1986).



While Warda is famous for being the first Lebanese and Arab woman to publish a collection of poems (Khairallah, 1996), many observers maintain that deciphering her poetry is difficult due to her style that makes it almost impossible to know how she felt, whether she led a happy life or not (Ziade, 1980). Those who knew her well claim that she possessed an outstanding ability to vocally articulate her thoughts and ideas in such a way that it left the listener utterly fascinated. This is further confirmed by *Shaykh* Ibrahim who would usually remain speechless when having a discussion with his sister (Ziade, 1980).

DEPARTURE

In 1899, escaping her life in Beirut, Warda moved to Alexandria, Egypt, with her son Salim Chamoun, where she spent the remaining years of her life and died at the age of 87. Today, she continues to be remembered as the Arab Rose.

According to Zeidan (1995), *"We do not know anything about her [Warda's] personal life or whether she was happy or not. There are no clues to her private life in her poetry, which draws only an outline and deals with familiar events such as marriage, birth and death."*

(p. 57)

The correspondence she exchanged with the female writers of her time in Syria, Egypt, and Baghdad demonstrated kindness and mastery of expression.

(Maskouni, 1946)

NOTES

1 Nasif al-Yazigi (1800-1871) was a Lebanese writer.

2 Sultan Abdul-Hamid II (1842-1918) was the 34th Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, ruling from 1876 to 1909.

3 Ibrahim al-Yazigi (1847-1906) was a Lebanese philosopher, poet, and journalist.

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ZAYNAB FAWWAZ

(1860-1940)

Zaynab Fawwaz was a woman of many calibers. She was the first female novelist in the Arab world, a renowned journalist, poet, playwright, biographer, and an outspoken critic for women's rights.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Born in 1860 in Tibnīn, Lebanon, Zaynab grew up in what has been described as a poor and respectful *Shīʿa* family. Although little is known about her upbringing, she spent her early years living in the home of the al-Assaad family, which ruled the village. There, she became one of the maids of Fatima al-Assaad[1] who influenced the course of her life.

Zaynab occupied a special place in Fatima's heart (Nasrallah, 2001). Fatima taught the vivacious girl how to read and write and nourished her appreciation for culture. Under Fatima's tutelage, Zaynab studied the *Qurʾān* and other Islamic, historical, and literary classics.

Not only did Fatima enhance Zaynab's education, but she also facilitated her marriage to a man named Mohammad Hamoud Fawwaz (Nasrallah, 2001). The marriage did not last long, for many rumored reasons, one being the huge intellectual gap between the couple (*Al-Safīr,* 1981). While the marriage was fated to collapse, the experience molded and influenced Zaynab's views regarding men, marriage, and the role of women (Nasrallah, 2001). After the divorce, she became of the opinion that:

"A woman who attaches herself to a vile man… who surrenders herself to him and struggles to please him but receives only coldness… becomes like someone who writes on the surface of water… and if this is the case then why doesn't she prefer her original [single] status to a foul companion."

(Al-Matar, 1984, p. 14)

In fact, these views are clearly highlighted in her notable book *Al-Rasāʾil al-Zaynabīyya* (1899). In it, she presented a collection of letters and articles that urge women not to restrict themselves to domestic life, and like men, participate in bold undertakings in the public sphere. Most significantly, this book was regarded as the first feminist voice in the region.

A PUZZLING PORTRAIT

Many critics and biographers have repeatedly speculated about the life of this atypical 19th century woman whose works left a mark on the history of Arabic literature. Mohammad Youssef Muqallid[2] marveled at Fawwaz's literary talent. He wrote, "Where did such a girl find the early inclination toward books? She did not inherit this from a mother or father nor from her environment, which was generally illiterate" (Al-Matar, 1984, p. 11).

A decade later, Nasrallah (2001) would pose the same question pondering, yet again, the source of Zaynab's mature intellectual disposition. She would also wonder about the nature of a woman who had the courage to defy traditional thoughts and attitudes regarding her gender. On the other hand, others would be intrigued by whether Zaynab was really the beautiful and charismatic woman some claimed she was. Also, they would inquire about the reasons that have kept her writings from the attention of the modern reader. Unfortunately, the answers are still fraught with various conflicting anecdotes and tales. Thus, the reader who seeks a more coherent portrait of Zaynab will have to unlock the secret codes of her personality through her writings.

EGYPT: A SECOND HOMELAND

Although Zaynab grew up in Lebanon, she spent most of her life in Egypt. In some instances, the writer herself has even been identified as Egyptian. Clearly, Zaynab must have had a special relationship with the country where she plucked the fruit of her literary talent. Nevertheless, many questioned the motive behind her move to Egypt.

Prominent researcher and journalist Jurji Baz[3] claimed Zaynab fled to Egypt to escape an obsessive admirer (Nasrallah, 2001) – one of Zaynab's relatives was fanatically in love with her to the point that he wheeled her into a forest and tied her to a tree to persuade her to marry him. Fortunately, when a group of strangers passed by, she sought help. They set her free and took her with them to Beirut where she then worked as a maid in the home of an Egyptian family, that of Youssef Hamdi. She soon married one of Hamdi's attendants and accompanied him to Egypt. There, Zaynab caught the attention of the owner of *al-Nīl* magazine, Hasan Husni Pasha al-Tuwayrani,[4] who was a friend of her employers and took charge of furthering her education (Nasrallah, 2001). From then on, no one could stop her from writing.

However, Fawzia Fawwaz, who has written the latest research on Zaynab's life and works, vehemently refuted this version by claiming Zaynab simply went to Egypt to seek literary recognition, like everyone else. Moreover, the researcher stated that the young woman traveled in the company of her brother who worked as a lawyer and was living there at the time (Nasrallah, 2001). Whatever the case, one thing remains certain: in Egypt, Zaynab seized opportunities and thrived, achieving the peak of her literary talent.

Zaynab's articles, which appeared in many magazines and newspapers, such as *Al-Muaʾyyed, Al-Fatat,* and *ʾAnīs al-Jalīs,* strongly pushed women to rise above the pits of intellectual ignorance and slumber. Her book, *Al-Rasāʾil al-Zaynabīyya,* approached this theme from multiple perspectives and, as a result, became the first book to call for the emancipation of women. Interestingly enough, it preceded the much-discussed call of Qasim Amin[5] for women's liberation in *The Liberation of Women* which came out in 1899 (Nasrallah, 2001).

THE VOICE OF INNOVATION

According to Zeidan (1995), although Zaynab was veiled, the young writer left no opportunity to slip by without reiterating her belief in women's rights. She believed that women are as qualified as men to participate in all walks of life. Moreover, Zaynab's interest in women's affairs was not exclusive to the Arab world. She was perhaps the only Arab woman to disapprove of a decision by members of the International Women's Union in 1893 that proclaimed that women should devote their time to household duties (Nasrallah, 2001). Also, in her writings, Zaynab repeatedly compared the status of Arab women to those in the West. She often posed the following:

"How often we have heard that in the European countries and in America there are many women who have taken part in the spread of scientific and industrial progress through periodicals which they edited. On many occasions we were told about some of them [Western women] who toured countries, traversed deserts, and went across rivers while dressed like men, enduring enormous hardships in pursuit of scientific knowledge to report to their newspapers, or out of a desire to explore the conditions prevailing in those countries and to inquire into the customs and beliefs of the inhabitants."

(Zeidan, 1995, p. 65)

Most notably, Zaynab also became the first novelist in the Arab region with the publication of *Ḥusn al-ʿAwāqib* in 1899 (Shaaban, 1999). The novel, which addressed the theme of good vs. evil, was unique in that it was characterized by "the inclusion of 'autobiographical' elements," something that was unfamiliar at the time (Zeidan, 1995, p. 66). Consequently, it was hailed by prominent critics of that age.

On another note, she wrote an anthology entitled Al-*Dur al-Manthūr Fī Ṭabaqāt Rabāt al-Khudūr* (1894 – 1895) "that traced the lives of more than four hundred and fifty-six Arab and Western women from ancient and modern history" (Shaaban, 1999, p. 51). In her introduction to the book, Zaynab explained that what drove her to embark on this project was the lack of Arabic publications and documents that highlighted the works of many talented women. In her study on this anthology, Booth (2001) asserted that "what Fawwaz produced made a difference to the production of gendered biography in periodicals" and "offered a language in which to express the changing experiences and expectations of (some) turn-of-the-century Arab women" (p. 4). Zaynab went as far as offering the volume to the World's Section of the World Columbian Exposition in 1893 in Chicago, to laud Arab women's achievements and progress. The anthology has since been described as "a priceless treasure."

Zaynab was also the first Arab woman to experiment with playwriting and the result was one play entitled *Al-Hawā wa al-Wafāʾ* (1893). The major theme of this work was the impediments imposed by relations of those seeking true love. In short, Zaynab's achievements reflect a major reality; the young woman dared to do what many feared. Consequently, she became a unique voice in women's history.

MARRIAGE AND DISCONTENT

As Zaynab attained one success after another, she caught the attention of many; one was the Syrian Adib Nazmi,[6] the editor-in-chief of *al-Shām* newspaper. Nasrallah (2001) explained that Nazmi sent a letter of admiration as a precursor to a "proxy marriage." After that, she traveled by sea to Beirut, then by train to Damascus, and journeyed to a village called Shaykh Maskīn and, from there to Ḥawrān. Once there, Zaynab seemed to miss her busy life in Egypt but even when she moved to Damascus, she remained restless. She participated in the literary and cultural discussions held at her spouse's home, but always did that from behind a curtain, a factor that must have constrained her liberal spirits. Moreover, the fact that her husband had three other wives upset her; Zaynab had strong views about multiple wives and regarded it as a "disease that destroys a woman through jealousy... and fosters children's hostility to one another" (Al-Matar, 1984, pp. 21-22). Soon enough, the young woman was asking for a divorce and returning to the country of her heart, Egypt, where she resumed her literary activities, leaving behind a devastated Nazmi.

No one could tell if Nazmi was the last man in Zaynab's life. Some reports claimed that, later, Zaynab married an Egyptian brigadier, whose name has never been identified. Others assert that she remained single. Like many aspects of her personal life, this rumor remained an unsolved mystery.

NOSTALGIA AND HOMESICKNESS

Although Zaynab remained in Egypt and continued to write until her final days, some sources say she was repeatedly attacked by spasms of nostalgia for her hometown, Tibnīn, which she expressed in her writing. It is also said that she was planning to go back to her native village and reunite with familiar sights, sounds, and places. However, her deteriorating physical condition hindered the fulfillment of her wish. In 1914, Zaynab passed away.

She was highly regarded by the cultural and literary community and deeply mourned in one publication after another. The writer, who was dubbed "the pearl of her age," had left behind a literary legacy that has only recently regained its proper recognition and acknowledgment. For years, Zaynab's works were overlooked by many modern critics. There was even a time when her writings were not easily accessible. Nowadays, in remembrance of women's literary history, it is difficult to not recall Zaynab and her intriguing mysteries.

Booth (2001) described Zaynab as a *"Canon of Female Visibility".* (p. 1)

Zaynab was *"a paragon of virtue and courage with an unwavering commitment to writing in favor of women's advancement and benefit."* (*Fatāt al-Sharq*, 1907, p. 228)

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1 Fatima al-Assaad (1903-1978) was an influential Lebanese political figure in the Jabal ʿĀmil region.

2 Mohammad Youssef Muqallid (1913-1965) was a Lebanese poet.

3 Jurji Baz (1881-1959) was a prominent twentieth century Lebanese renaissance figure, writer, historian, and journalist.

4 Hasan Husni Pasha al-Tuwayrani (1849-1896) was the publisher of al-Nīl magazine.

5 Qasim Amin (1863-1908) was an Egyptian jurist, Islamic modernist, and the father of Egyptian feminism.

6 Adib Nazmi (1840–1918) was a Syrian journalist and poet.

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PROFESSIONALS

ALEXANDRA ISSA AL-KHOURY

(1926-1997)

Distinguished by her humanity, Alexandra Issa al-Khoury devoted her life to service the Lebanese Red Cross. Through unparalleled selfless dedication, she inspired her entourage and served as a beacon of hope and compassion to many.

EARLY LIFE

Born in 1909, Alexandra Issa al-Khoury was the daughter of Marquise Alice and Jean de Freige. Her father valued Alexandra's passion for reading and often took her along on his travels, one of which left a remarkable imprint on her. She was fascinated by Russia, the land of the Tsars.

Alexandra was so studious that she refused to spend vacations at their summer house in Ḥursh al-Sunayj, without having a tutor to prepare her for the Baccalaureate. Father Campond, an old French Jesuit priest, was called especially from Beirut for that purpose. After successfully passing her Baccalaureate, Alexandra went to law school at Saint Joseph University of Beirut (USJ).

After graduating, Alexandra taught for a year at Nazareth School. She also tutored her sister Odette al-Khoury at home for a year before Odette completed her academic pursuits. Nothing could curtail Alexandra's enthusiasm and perseverance, which remained unabated despite suffering from poor health and chronic fevers.

Alexandra met her husband-to-be for the first time when he was treating her for a mild typhoid episode. Dr. Farid Issa al-Khoury and Alexandra shared an instant spark that eventually turned to love. They got married and had three children – a son and two daughters. Unfortunately, they lost one of them at a very young age.

A CAREER OF LEADERSHIP AND DEDICATION

The Red Cross always constituted a large part of Alexandra's family life. From packing relief kits in times of crisis to attending workshops and ceremonies, Alexandra's dedication and involvement had her appointed President of the Red Cross in 1964, taking over after her mother, Alice de Freige (Nuwayhid, 1986). She remained in this position until 1991; her mandate saw the opening of a blood bank and the inauguration of numerous Red Cross branches in Lebanon, in addition to establishing nursing institutes, first aid centers, and ambulant dispensaries (Al-*Ṣayyād,* 2000, p. 10).

Alexandra was known for her disciplined routine; she would wake up at 5:00 a.m. every morning to read, complete her chores, and then head to the Red Cross. At work, she was known to be strict, organized, and punctual while remaining kind and understanding. Her motto was "Work in silence and with vigilance" (M. Ezzeddine, personal communication, March 10, 2002). In the afternoons, Alexandra would spend time with her family. Her daughter, Marilyse Ezzeddine, stated:

"Though at times my father missed her presence, they were a great couple. They did everything together. For example, they used to frequently go to the movies and theater. The family always gathered for dinner at 8 p.m. after which my parents went out to play bridge or pinnacle with their friends."

(personal communication, March 10, 2002)

After her husband passed away and the war broke out, Alexandra dedicated all her time to the Red Cross which played a central role in assisting wounded and abducted individuals, displaced families, and distributing essential amenities to those most in need. As Alexandra long emphasized, "the Red Cross is for all people, for all classes, for all sects, for all soldiers, for all citizens unanimously, with no distinction between one person and another" (*Al-Safīr*, 1978, p. 5).

Alexandra organized training sessions and regular meetings with the International Committee, in which she represented Lebanon as the Vice President of the permanent committee for the Lebanese Red Cross and Red Crescent in Geneva. She was a member of the Executive Committee of the Baalbeck International Festival. She also served on the board of the Mouvement Social, a local organization that sought to establish

HONORING AND RECOGNITION

Alexandra was granted several medals in recognition of her approximately 27 years of service at the Red Cross Organization and dedication to humanitarian causes. Among her awards are the Lebanese Order of Merit, the National Order of the Cedars, the Jordanian Kawkab Merit, the Cameroun Merit, the Henri Dunan Merit, the Vatican Merit of Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice, the Netherlands Red Cross Golden Order Merit, the French Red Cross Silver Order Merit, and the Korean and Turkish Honour Orders of Merit. Additionally, in 2010, a street in Qanṭārī, Beirut, located on the rear side of the Red Cross headquarters, was named after Alexandra in her honor (*Al-Safīr,* 2010).

"We never had the impression that she was not paying attention to what we were telling her. She had the ability to listen to more than one person at a time. She benefited from such an enormous faculty of concentration."

(M. Ezzeddine, personal communication, March 10, 2002)

"My mother had always sought through her work to achieve unity between Lebanese people. She firmly believed in the effectiveness of dialogue between religions and sects."

(M. Ezzeddine, personal communication, March 10, 2002)

Lebanon was beloved to Alexandra's heart. As she stated: *"Populations cease to exist, and nations prevail, and we will cease to exist, and Lebanon will prevail. However, for Lebanon to remain a role model and an inspiration to the entire world, it must be blessed with unity among its children. This unity that is rooted in the hearts of all Lebanese, and the unity that only strange hands attempt to destroy. Let us love each other as we have done for generations."*

(*Al-Safīr*, 1982, p. 7)

NOTES

1 Marquise Alice (1964-1880) was a philanthropist and the co-founder of the Lebanese Red Cross Organization.

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ALICE CHIHA DE FREIGE

(1880-1964)

Turning away from the superficial pleasures of life, Alice de Freige immersed herself in charity and philanthropic deeds. She was one of the most highly respected and acknowledged women of her time.

BACKGROUND AND FAMILY

Born in 1880, Alice Chiha de Freige was the daughter of Antoine Chiha and Adma Pharaon. She was born and raised in Beirut, educated at the Nazareth School, and was privately tutored at home in French and English as well as painting and music.

At the age of 14, Alice was forced to leave the Nazareth School due to her mother's sudden death at the early age of 37. As the eldest daughter, Alice took over raising her seven siblings. Eventually, Laure Chiha, her youngest sister, married Bechara al-Khoury and became Lebanon's First Lady in 1943 and one of her brothers, Michel Chiha, found success in politics. Alice, on the other hand, married Jean de Freige, with whom she had a peaceful relationship, and became known as Marquise de Freige. She often accompanied her husband to the properties they owned and helped him manage them, an unusual behavior for most rich women of her time who preferred living the luxurious city life (*Al-Marʾa al-Jadīda*, 1923).

A CARING MOTHER

Alice was an overprotective mother, who carefully watched over her children's education. Her daughters Odette, Aimée, and Alexandra studied at the school neighboring their house, the *Saint Joseph de L'Apparition*. According to Aimée de Freige, "My mother used to call us from the window overlooking the courtyard. She used to say: 'put your jackets on, put your coats on'" (personal communication, April 11, 2003).

Upon the insistence of her husband's aunt, Mother de Freige (who was a nun), Alice moved her daughters to the Nazareth Boarding School under the condition of sleeping at home every night. Consequently, the school changed its regulations and started accepting half-boarders, the first of whom were Odette and Aimée, followed by their cousins Gladys and Mary Choucair (A. Fattal, personal communication, April 11, 2003).

PHILANTHROPIC WORK

Alice was a simple woman who did not pursue her studies but remained influential on more than one level. For instance, she was an active member in philanthropic associations – she was treasurer of the Dames de Charité and was involved in the Handcrafts Committee of the Association for fighting tuberculosis.

At the same time, Alice's name had always been associated with the Lebanese Red Cross Organization, which she founded with her sister Laure Chiha. Together they worked as volunteers with the Lebanese French Association for Social Work, as early as 1925. Alice headed the Lebanese Red Cross, since its inception in 1945, and remained in this position until 1964. While serving as President, she worked to expand the Lebanese Red Cross's scope of activities to include several medical and charitable initiatives. During that period, the Lebanese Red Cross was able to expand its offering to cover multiple Lebanese areas (*Ṣawt al-Marʾa,* 1948). Alice also established the first Red Cross nursing school as well as a school for training hostesses, in addition to the numerous social and health service centers.

Alice's mandate at the Red Cross was consecutively renewed by all the Presidents of the Republic who followed Bechara al Khoury. It is only when Alice became very ill and could not handle the presidency any longer that her daughter, Alexandra Issa al-Khoury, was appointed as a successor.

INTEREST AND INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS

Along with her philanthropic work, Alice displayed interest in the Lebanese political life during the Mandate and post-independence periods. She was very well connected to French officials and ran a literary and political salon which played an important role in the country's political and social life. Her input was significant in vital decisions pertaining to her country's welfare.

ALICE AND FASHION

Alice was also renowned for wearing trendy hats, stylish dresses, and the most fashionable fur. During one of her trips to France, it was arranged that a model her size be assigned for the purpose of trying her clothes throughout the tailoring process as "dresses, especially tailored for her, were shipped on a regular basis from Paris to Beirut" (A. Fattal, personal communication, April 11, 2003).

Her niece, Madeleine Chiha Helou, was very fond of her aunt's sense of fashion. She assisted her in choosing the colors and accessories of her dresses and recalled:

“My aunt was very extravagant. She had a crazy appearance and a majestic look. I recall that on her deathbed at the Trad Hospital, she asked for a Kibbat Samak. The following day she passed away peacefully bidding farewell to the life she lived.”

(M. C. Helou, personal communication, April 5, 2003)

She stood out as a caring and loving lady who chose to forgo the pleasures of life and devote her days to her family and philanthropic deeds.

(*Al-Mar’a al-Jadīda*, 1923)

As she herself stated, *“The one who does not feel for the wounds of another person is an enemy to himself and to others.”*

(De Freige, 1950, p. 14)

NOTES

1 Bechara al-Khoury (1890-1964) was the first President of Lebanon, serving from 1943 to 1952.

2 Michel Chiha (1891-1954) was a Lebanese politician, banker and writer.

3 Alexandra Issa al-Khoury (1926-1997) was the president of the Lebanese Red Cross.

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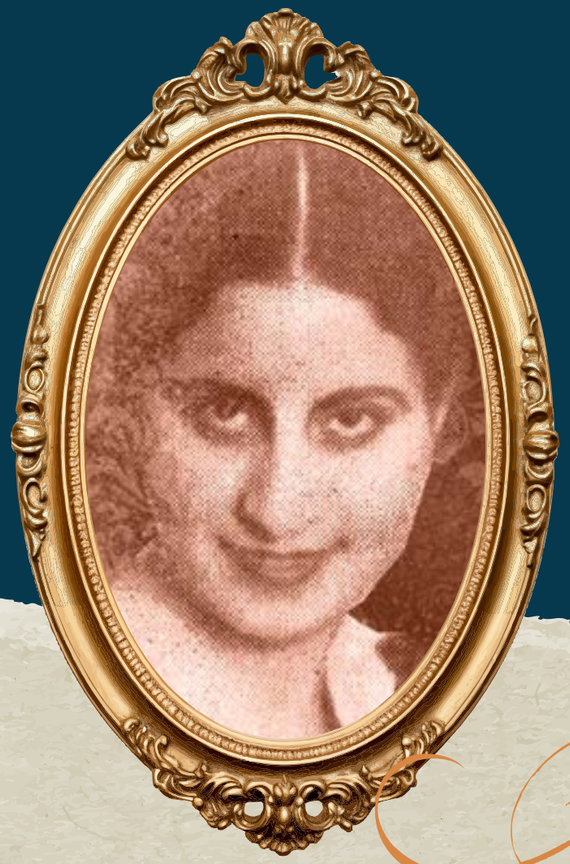

EDMA ABOU CHEDID

(1909 – 1992)

Edma Abou-Chedid was a woman like no other. She was a pioneer physician and a force that shattered the many stereotypes that hindered women's successes.

BITTERSWEET15

Born in 1909 in Sao Paolo, Brazil, Edma Abou-Chedid was two years old when she moved with her parents to their hometown, al-Abādiyya, in al-Matn, Lebanon. There, Edma grew up conscious of one reality: the suffering of women. She was specifically exposed to the stories of women who suffered during childbirth and who, in many instances, either lost their lives or their newborns.

Edma was barely 15 when she decided to study medicine. The young girl wanted to make a difference to the wellbeing of wives and mothers by providing them with the proper medical treatment and care (Nuwayhid, 2000). While her parents did not stand in her way, other hindrances thwarted her steps; still, the teenager faced the storm with courage that belied her age.

TOUGH CHALLENGES

Edma's decision to continue her education at the American University of Beirut (AUB) astonished the principal of the American School for Girls (ASG), currently the Lebanese American University (LAU), which Edma was attending. The decision baffled just about everyone who learned of it, as Edma's friend, Najla Akrawi explained:

> *"Since the foundation of that school in 1834, no graduate had ever aspired for higher education, let alone in a co-educational field. No young woman was expected to challenge society's deep-rooted traditions of seclusion for women… After graduation, she was supposed to stay at home, and wait for the appropriate and arranged suitor."*
>
> (Akrawi, 1993, p. 22)

Yet, Edma was not a typical teenager, she did not dream of a knight on an Arabian Stallion, or of a life of luxury and pampering. Thus, when the principal inquired, "How would you handle being the only woman student in a class of men from all over the Arab world?" (Jurdak, 1993, p. 12), Edma did not relent. She went home and convinced her parents of the suitability of her choice; however, her parents were not the only people whom she had to persuade. Her entire community was not a great supporter of her choice.

When she first applied to AUB, Edma was told that she was not going to be accepted because the university "cannot accept an only girl in a class full of boys" (Akrawi, 1993, p. 22). Yet, the Dean suggested she find a female companion. Again, the condition proved problematic. She could not find anyone to accompany her to her classes and had to resort to recruiting a foreign candidate from the United States (U.S.). However, when Edma, accompanied by the Dean, went to welcome the expected colleague, she found out that the latter had remained in Palestine after having fallen in love with someone there. Both were extremely disappointed at the twist in plans. The Dean soon allowed Edma to pursue her education without a companion. His decision was one that put Edma on the path she had constantly dreamt of.

Edma became the only girl to graduate with a Bachelor of Arts from AUB in 1926. She was also the only female doctor to graduate from the Medical School in 1931. The achievement did not go unnoticed. Edma's name made headlines. Reporters and photographers lauded her consecutive achievements for a long time afterward.

THE HOUSE OF THE NATION

Following her graduation, Edma traveled to Paris and London to specialize in pediatrics and gynecology. When she returned in 1934, she taught at AUB's Medical School and worked at the pediatrics clinic. Two years later, Edma's career took an upward loop when she was offered the chance to become a counselor at the Royal Medical College and a lecturer at the Training School for Girls in Baghdād, ʿIrāq – an offer which she wholeheartedly accepted.

In Baghdad, Edma set up a private clinic to cater to the needs of children and women. During this period, her friend Najla recalled that Edma was the center of their social activities. Her young, energetic, and active spirit drew friends and acquaintances to her, and her home was dubbed, "the house of the nation" (N. Akrawi, personal communication, September 25, 2003). As other teachers and friends got to know her, they realized that there was much beneath the surface of this young woman who faced the world with a cool façade. Edma could sew like a pro, cook like a professional chef, and socialize endlessly. Edma had a certain positive aura whenever she communed with others. Thus, her friends never went anywhere without her; everyone sought the company of this lively woman.

A SMALL EMPIRE

Life soon took Edma to the U.S. in 1946 to specialize in gynecology and obstetrics at Johns Hopkins University. Everything about the new country and culture intrigued Edma and she repeatedly shared her impressions of things around her with her friends.

Upon the completion of her studies, Edma returned to the American University of Beirut Medical Center (AUBMC) and became an Assistant Professor and later an Associate Professor in the Gynecology and Obstetrics department. She also set up a private clinic in her home, in ʿAyn al-Mraysi, where she received visitors from all over the Arab world (Jurdak, 1993). The same apartment that contained her clinic was also her home that became her empire through the years. According to Najla, Edma's apartment held her most precious possessions and her unique pieces of art (personal communication, September 25, 2003). From her ivory collection to her carpets and paintings, Edma decorated the place with belongings she had acquired from her travels. However, the little garden she had on her balcony was her favorite spot. She spent hours taking care of her rare plants and flowers.

A LOVING AND CARING PERSON

Even though Edma opted to live alone, she remained strongly attached to her family, particularly her father. The young woman never forgot that her father "had helped her realize her dreams" (N. Akrawi, personal communication, September 25, 2003). Moreover, Edma always stood by her family. For instance, when one of her sisters had a stroke, Edma did not ponder sending her to an elderly home. Rather, she took her to her apartment and for years, personally fed, and took care of her. Similarly, Edma performed such deeds with other people who were not related to her.

As loyal as Edma was to her family, she was also keen on her friends. This woman's fondness for entertaining helped her acquire a lot of friends, many of whom belonged to influential families from across the Arab region. Her friends included poets, writers, and members of royal families. Najla insisted that, contrary to the general opinion, Edma's friends were not merely from the upper class. She was invited to the Royal House of Jordan and to the homes of Saudi Princesses and she was proud of offering her medical expertise to them. Nevertheless, she never looked down on others. Regardless if patients could afford treatment, Edma still tended to them. Moreover, she asked her peers to reduce the consultation fee for those who requested it.

REALIZING THE DREAM

Professionally, Edma became an expert on sterility issues and succeeded in breaking a prevailing norm, according to which men were not to be submitted to medical tests (Akrawi, 1993). Pursuing her dream of providing better care for women, Edma helped establish the Family Planning Association in 1969 "to liberate women from having unwanted children, to improve the economic status of the family, and to introduce proper contraceptive methods" (Akrawi, 1993, p. 23). She also repeatedly stressed that family planning "was not abortion. It was avoiding poverty and giving children the chance to grow under proper conditions" (N. Akrawi, personal communication, September 25, 2003). Edma also set up a chain of free clinics to provide proper assistance for parents (Akrawi, 1993). At the height of her medical career, she repeatedly stressed that women should not limit their possibilities in life by letting conservative traditions dictate what they should and should not do. Rather, women should be brave and fight to realize their dreams. Edma strived to use her expertise and academic status to make a difference, and she succeeded in doing it.

Najla still vividly remembered the day she went into Edma's clinic and found her carrying two little babies. Najla recalled that as Edma checked on their well-being, she proudly whispered:

"We worked very hard on the mother to get children. She had been exposed to several miscarriages. We finally succeeded! Edma's happiness was not merely that of a medical specialist who had proven her expertise in the field, but rather that of someone who had contributed to the happiness of others."

(N. Akrawi personal communication, September 25, 2003)

READINESS TO MAKE SACRIFICES

Edma's success was at the expense of her personal life. She admitted it herself:

"I don't encourage our girls [to study medicine] because – after my long experience - I feel that the medical profession requires a lot of sacrifices and constant giving… which undoubtably stands in the face of a woman and her familial life… Let a woman apply for a medical profession… under the condition that she will be ambitious and ready to make big sacrifices."

(*Ṣawt al-Mar'a*, 1952, p. 12)

Clearly enough, Edma's devotion to her profession affected her personal life. However, it tampered little with her modesty. As Najla herself vouched, Edma remained humane and down-to-earth; success did not alter her personality, but the war changed her life.

FORCEFUL DISPLACEMENT

Years after the war erupted, Edma was forced to leave her home. Militias started harassing and accusing her of terrible deeds. They even captured her and asked for a large ransom, threatening that otherwise they would rape and abuse her. Edma refused to succumb to their demands and screamed at them, "Dare to do so… I am Edma Abou-Chedid" (N. Akrawi, personal communication, September 25, 2003). Although no one harmed her, the pressure took its toll and she had to move to an apartment in Sin El-Fil, where she spent the rest of her life with her brother Richard Abou-Chedid. The move devastated her, and she felt that she had been uprooted. Najla remembered, "It broke our heart. We lost her and she lost her roots" (personal communication, September 25, 2003). At the time, most of her family had passed away and she had lost contact with two of her nieces who lived in the U.S. Sadly, life had turned upside down for Edma and the notable physician lived in internal exile.

HONORING AND RECOGNITION

Despite the war and the deep sadness that came along with it, Edma received several decorations for her exemplary humanitarian career. She was mainly rewarded for the medical services she provided over the past 50 years, half of which were at the AUB Medical Center (*AUB Bulletin,* 1986). Other awards included: the Lebanese Golden Order of Merit (1957), the St. Paul's Merit (1958), the Jordanian *Kawkab* Merit (1962), the Medal Merit from Jerusalem Sacred Tomb (1962), the Golden Merit from the Lebanese Association for Higher Education, the National Order of the Cedars (1969), and the Order of Merit, Officer Rank (1986).

A SILENT DEATH

In 1992, Edma died of a heart attack. At the time, the country was experiencing a huge political uproar, and, as a result, few of her friends made it to the funeral. Najla also asserted that little was said about her death in the press; nothing was said about the fact that before her death she was nominated by the International Biographical Center in Cambridge as "the International Woman of the Year," nor of the fact that she was awarded "the one-in-a Million" medal (N. Akrawi, personal communication, September 25, 2003). The woman who had spent her life featured on the pages of many newspapers did not find a newspaper to lament her death and hail her accomplishments.

Driven by a strong commitment to social service, Edma became involved in many associations, particularly those that promoted women's freedom and welfare (Akrawi, 1993). Her achievements included the following:

- Member of the International Association of Female Diseases and Obstetrics
- Founder of the Lebanese Female University Graduates Association and President of the Association (1957-1958)
- President of the Female Doctors Association (1958 – 1963)
- Vice-President of the Lebanese Association for Higher Education
- President of the Family Planning Association (1969 – 1975)

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JANINE RUBEIZ

(1926 – 1992)

No other than Janine Rubeiz was able to ignite a cultural awakening. She was a smart and courageous woman who went above and beyond to find common ground among people.

A LIBERAL UPBRINGING

Born in 1926, Janine was the daughter of Marcelle, who came from a family known for their love of music, and Dr. Nicolas Rubeiz, who was often described as a secular maverick (Kassab, 2003). Janine had three siblings, Nicole, Claude, and Georges Rubeiz. In their house in Beirut, Lebanon, her family was regularly frequented by Lebanese and Arab artists, writers, and poets.

Janine and her siblings went to the French secular school *Lycée Français Laïque*, currently Lycée Abdel Kader, because their father wanted them to become free critical thinkers (Sultan, 1991a). In Janine's words:

"My father was an atheist... As such, we never received any religious teaching. He used to say: 'When you grow up, you will learn about all the religions, and you will decide whether they interest you or not.' He was a Marxist before it was the trend to be one... He was a Freudian too. I grew up in a scientific milieu... It was only later that I realized that all the ideas I adopted and believed differed from those

of our social milieu. It was very difficult for me to adjust to this reality."

(Kassab, 2003, p. 42)

Janine grew up in a family that did not discriminate between boys and girls. For instance, at a time when it was unthinkable for girls to circulate in the streets of Beirut unveiled and without a chaperone, they used to bike to school in shorts. According to Janine's daughter, Nadine Begdache, on several occasions, when they crossed the famous Ḥamrā street of Rās Beirut, people would throw tomatoes at them, but this never affected them (N. Begdache, personal communication, March 20, 2003).

AN AMBITIOUS, FREE, AND RESOURCEFUL YOUNG WOMAN

As a young girl, Janine was very much impressed by Albert Einstein, and she stood out for her mastery of mathematics. She adored the subject and planned to travel abroad to pursue her higher education in mathematics. Her sister Claude remembered:

"It was not easy to grow up with a sister so beautiful and talented as she was. She had just turned 16 and she had a 19 over 20 as average in mathematics. The school director came to my parents and insisted that Janine should continue her studies in France. My mother's only dream was to get her married. She did not want to hear anything of the sort. So, they offered her a convertible car and a fur coat. It was not enough to stop her."

(Kassab, 2003, p. 24)

Janine graduated from the Lycée with both French and Lebanese Baccalaureates. In line with her ambition to increase her knowledge of mathematics, she enrolled at the Ecole des Lettres.

While her father encouraged her scholarly pursuits, her mother insisted that she marry and start a family.

At the age of 20, Janine fell in love with Nadim Majdalany, a young architect, and married him. They had a fancy wedding, which took place in July 1946, in the Dāmūr area, south of Beirut. It received wide press coverage, and in Nadine's words, "It was the biggest wedding of the season." (personal communication, March 20, 2003). Recalling the days of the honeymoon in Paris, Janine once stated:

"We traveled to Paris for our honeymoon, and it was my first time leaving Lebanon. Truthfully, I was amazed. I stayed there for five months (instead of one month) and visited the Louvre around 40 times; I used to stand for hours in front of the masterpieces that I got to learn about up close. As for the afternoon, I used to dedicate it for music while in the evening, I would often attend important plays… As for me, my initial discovery of Paris as a capital of culture was also a discovery of myself and my inclination toward culture and art."

(Sultan, 1991a, para. 9)

Soon after they returned from Paris, Janine and Nadim had their only child Nadine and Janine resumed assisting Nadim in his firm. As part of her involvement in promoting Jean Royère's creative architecture and furniture designs, Janine took part in a number of successful local and international projects; some of these took place in Iran, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, where they designed the interior decoration of royalties' residences. In just a little time, their business boomed (N. Begdache, personal communication, March 20, 2003).

Janine and Nadim's life as a happy couple, unfortunately, did not last long. Having grown up in a progressive family, it was impossible for Janine to get used to abiding by the rules of the conservative milieu Nadim grew up in. Recalling this stressful period of her life Janine explained:

"When we returned to Beirut, my husband wanted to place me within the familial traditions. I could not get used to the Lebanese bourgeois lifestyle that consisted of […] talking about fashion and getting your hair done, etc. I felt that life was short and it would be a pity to scatter it with gossip and futile actions."

(Sultan, 1991a, para. 10)

Two years after the problems started Janine decided to opt out of the joint business with her husband. As the schism between them deepened, she took refuge in books, spending her days doing nothing but reading philosophy books, classical novels, world stories, and modern plays. Describing this phase, Janine states:

"My contact with humans was for half an hour to an hour and then I shut myself in my room. I could stay in my room for hours and days… I surfed in my mathematics"

(Kassab, 2003, p. 443).

Disputes between Janine and Nadim became aggravated. The ten-year marriage finally ended with a divorce. Nadine recalled that after they broke up, her parents maintained a healthy environment to raise their only child:

"Although I lived with my father, my mother was by my side all the time. I never experienced the problems which children of divorced couples sometimes endured. I saw my mother every day; she came over every afternoon, watching over my homework and helping me with my lessons… My mother took me with her wherever she went."

(N. Begdache, personal communication, March 20, 2003)

THE PERIOD OF LIBERATION AND DĀR AL-FAN

Following the divorce, Janine worked toward achieving economic independence. After the divorce, she took the most important decision of her life: to work and care for herself. She strongly believed that women's liberation begins from their financial independence. Thus, she decided to become emotionally and financially liberated (Sultan, 1991a, para. 11).

Janine's first idea was to become a math teacher. Instead, she opened one of the first boutiques in Lebanon that sold ready-made clothes to women, which after consulting with her daughter, she named "Janina." It was located in the Clémenceau area of Beirut. Janine's project, however, lasted for only five years. After that, she worked briefly with the American Life Insurance and then served as a volunteer with the Baalbeck Festivals committee until she resigned in 1965. During this time, she worked alongside Mounir Abou Debs to incorporate international standards of theater and ballet into the Baalbek programs (Sultan, 1991b). Shortly after she resigned, Janine started meeting daily with artists, writers, scholars, and poets to deliberate various issues. Soon, the group felt the need for a location of their own to freely exchange their ideas.

After consulting with friends and lawyers, Janine co-founded an anonymous shareholding company named *Dār al-Fan,* whose capital was 50,000 Lebanese pounds. Its 1000 shares were sold in no time, for just 50.00 Lebanese pounds each. More than 105 Lebanese writers, poets, professors, philosophers, actors, directors, singers, and dancers rushed to become shareholders in this company. In order to guarantee an even influence over the company's development, each could only buy up to 10 shares.

Janine was also quick to spot the ideal place to conduct their activities; it was a traditional Lebanese house. Once in use, it served as a multipurpose space to hold exhibitions, conferences, concerts, and project films. A room served as a library, another as the administration, and a third as an office. The rest of the house was refurbished to accommodate a bar, a garden, and a cafeteria. The inauguration ceremony took place in November 1967; among the guests of honor were the French thinker André Pieyre de Mandiargues and his wife the painter Bonna Tilbertelli de Pisis, whose work was exhibited (Sultan, 1991b). According to Janine's grandson, Karim Begdache, *Dār al-Fan* was created:

> *"To create a space where genuine dialogue, discussions, and confrontations could take place… Through the Lebanese identity of Dār al-Fan, its openness to the Arab world, its genuinely modern character, and freedom from religious servitude, Janine meant to lay the foundations for [a free, Arab, and secular Lebanon]."*
>
> (personal communication, September 25, 2003)

During its first year, *Dār al-Fan* hosted over 20 conferences, exhibitions, and concerts. In Nadine's words:

During its first year, Dār al-Fan hosted over 20 conferences, exhibitions, and concerts. In Nadine's words:

> *"The years of Dār al-Fan influenced the political, cultural, intellectual and artistic scenes of Lebanon. Prominent politicians such as Pierre Gemayel and Kamal Jumblatt stood on Dār al-Fan's podium to defend their ideas. Many prominent religious figures such as Musa al-Sadr, Hassan Khaled, and Georges Khodr gathered around and took part in discussions too."*
>
> (personal communication, March 20, 2003)

In addition to promoting and encouraging creativity among the youth, *Dār al-Fan* organized workshops, drawing competitions, puppet shows, and theater courses, as well as yearly painting and poetry competitions. Poetic evenings involved mostly Lebanese talents, with a few French guests, and one Russian poet who left a lasting impression on the audience, Yevgeny Yevtushenko (Kassab, 2003). As for concerts held at the center, some involved Lebanese musicians, while others featured foreign virtuoso performers recommended by embassies of their respective countries.

When she returned to Beirut in 1969 following a trip abroad, Janine was elected once more as President of *Dār al-Fan*. The center was experiencing financial difficulties because it depended solely on cultural events to secure funding and many of its activities relied on benevolent parties. However, under Janine's leadership, events began to generate revenue.

SECULARISM, SOCIALISM, AND FEMINISM

Janine's nationalism and belief in equality grew more pronounced by the day. This led her to join Kamal Jumblatt's Socialist Party in 1973. Amal Dibo, one of Janine's friends, believed that the leftist thinking that her father and his friends ingrained in her was reminiscent of the biggest political thinker in Lebanon, Kamal Jumblatt. Janine was so attached to her belief in equality and sympathized greatly with the marginalized and abused, which pushed her towards socialism. The fight for women's full participation socially, politically, and economically was one she focused on the most.

Janine's most remarkable achievement during this socialist journey was the founding of the Progressive Women's Union. With one of her comrades in the party, Rashid Hasan, she drafted the union's program, which stemmed from the conviction that equality between men and women at all levels of existence is a natural right. The program suggested sex education in schools to provide a healthy upbringing for future generations. It also planned to foster family planning and safeguard mothers' and children's rights through paid maternity leave, affiliation of day-care centers to workplaces, and subsidized health services. Janine's strong belief in democracy and the right of women to equality led her to become a member of other parties and associations, including the Democratic Party for the Liberalization of Women and the Family Planning Association.

THE WAR AND ATTEMPTS TO REVIVE DĀR AL-FAN

When the Civil War started in 1975, Janine worked hard to maintain the activities at the center, but with little success because it became impossible to venture outside one's home, let alone to the demarcation line where *Dār al-Fan* was located. The last event held at *Dār al-Fan* before the outbreak of the civil war was a concert by Henri Goraieb; on June 26, 1975, despite heavy shelling, the concert went on with a full house. Unfortunately, during April 1976, Janine found that every recording and transcript of conferences, musicals, theatrical, and poetic evenings were lost:

"They left me nothing… that was a major source of frustration… The house was vandalized, put on fire and demolished. Nothing was left. Even doors and tiles were stolen. Nothing remained, only ruins… Dār al-Fan was completely destroyed and devastated; only a few archives were saved."

(Kassab, 2003, pp. 22-23)

When the fighting subdued in 1977 there was an attempt to revive the *Dār al-Fan* activities. In 1978, Janine organized an exhibition entitled "Lebanon 1978," which included an array of paintings reflecting hopes for a unified Lebanon. One hundred and five Lebanese artists participated in this event. However, as the tempo of the war picked up again, it was not possible to institute a new *Dār al-Fan* like the one Janine and her friends established towards the end of the 1960s.

Despite this tragedy, Janine and her daughter Nadine continued to organize conferences and exhibitions at various hotels throughout, and after, the war years. A part of Janine's house was consecrated for holding cultural events. To Janine, *Dār al-Fan* was not finished. The dream of resuscitating the *Dār al-Fan* project remained with Janine until the day she passed away from a terminal illness in 1992.

"Among her contemporaries, Janine Rubeiz stands out as the prominent Lebanese lady who 'had an unlimited capacity to work, achieve and produce … [and who] liked to see others working, achieving and producing.'"

(Jurdak, 1992, para. 5-6)

"True, I am a woman of action… I would rather say, though, that I have become a woman of action. Had I left my capacities to develop on their own, and had I let my personality develop on its own, in another environment and another context, I do not think I would have become a woman of action. Circumstances made me become the woman I am."

(Rubeiz, as cited in Kassab, 2003, p. 41)

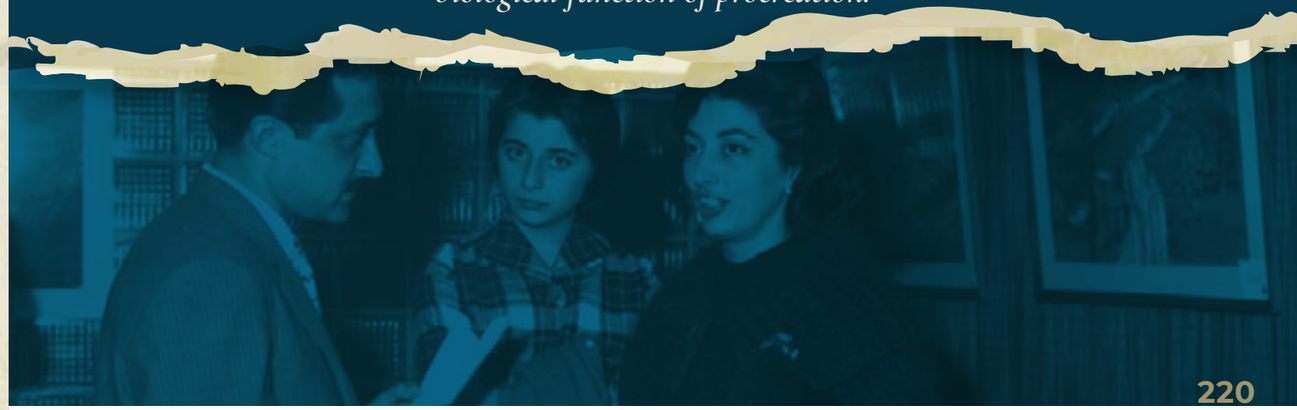
"Janine's love for Nadim was exceptional. One evening shortly before they got married, when they were both attending an event at the Grand Hotel in Ṣūfar, she threw her glass of champagne in the direction of Nadim when she saw him dancing with another woman."

(N. Begdache, personal communication, March 20, 2003)

In its eight years of relentless efforts, Dār al-Fan organized more than *"240 conferences and debates, 60 poetic evenings, 90 exhibitions, 150 film projections, and six theatrical plays."*

(Kassab, 2003, p. 20)

A number of manuscripts, speeches, interviews, and lectures salvaged from under the ruins of Dār al-Fan, illustrate Janine's conceptualization of the emancipation of women. To Janine, liberation starts when women refuse to be reduced to their biological function of procreation.



NOTES

1 Albert Einstein (1879-1955) was a prominent German physicist and Nobel Prize Winner in 1921.

2 Jean Royère (1902-1981) was a French interior designer.

3 Mounir Abou Debs (1931-2016) was a Lebanese director and founder of the School of Modern Theatre of Beirut.

4 André Pieyre de Mandiargues (1909-1991) was a French writer.

5 Bonna Tilbertelli de Pisis (1925-2000) was an Italian painter.

6 Pierre Gemayel (1905-1984) was the founder of the Katāʾib party and member of the Lebanese parliament.

7 Kamal Jumblatt (1917-1977) was a Lebanese politician and founder of the Progressive Socialist Party.

8 Moussa al-Sadr (1928) was an Iranian-Lebanese Shi'a Muslim cleric and the founder of Ḥarakat al-Maḥrūmīn, currently Ḥarakat Amal in Lebanon. He mysteriously disappeared in 1978 while on a trip to Libya.

9 Hassan Khaled (1921–1989) was a Lebanese Sunni Muslim leader.

10 Yevgeny Yevtushenko (1932-2017) was a Soviet-Russian writer, poet, actor, film director, and university professor.

11 Henri Goraieb (1935-2021) was a Lebanese pianist and musician.

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MARYAM KHAIRO

(UNKNOWN-1996)

With much audacity and fearlessness, Maryam Khairo became the first nude model in Lebanon who inspired some of the most famous artists. Given her unmatched passion for original artistic endeavors, she broke the stigma and taboo regarding women's bodily autonomy.

THE BEGINNING

Born in Ḥawrān, Syria, Maryam Khairo was of Syrian origins and was raised in a Bedouin family. She grew up in one of the poor outskirts of Beirut known as the Karantīna. For many years, she endured misery and deprivation. She never had the chance to go to school or receive any kind of formal education; she was still a little girl when she started working as a maid at the house of *Shaykh* Maurice Gemayel[1] in al-Sayfee area of downtown Beirut. Her family depended greatly on the little income she earned.

Along with helping with housework, Maryam's work at the residence of *Shaykh* Maurice included delivering packages to *Shaykh* Cesar Gemayel[2] and checking on his mother, "*Sitt Umm Kaysar*." On one of those assignments, while Maryam was walking down the street toward the house of *Shaykh* Cesar, a man approached her and offered to draw her face (Nammar, 2001). This man turned out to be the famous Lebanese painter Habib Srour[3] for whom Maryam posed for several times, before he passed away in 1939. Remembering this incident, Maryam recalled:

"[he] did not face difficulty in convincing me. I needed the money, and he assured me that he was going to draw my face only while wearing Bedouin clothes. That is what happened. So, my Bedouin face introduced me to a new professional world, and I found myself sitting comfortably in front of the artist."

(Nammar, 2001, p. 14)

THE JOURNEY WITH CESAR GEMAYEL

In 1937, Maryam began posing for Cesar. The first time she was supposed to pose for him to draw the portrait of a Bedouin girl, he asked her to meet him at his residence. From there, he told her to follow him to the studio. They went through a back street because he did not want to be seen with her. From the very beginning, he kept her his secret. Relating this incident Maryam asserted:

"He told me to follow him. Instead of going down the stairs to the front door, he climbed up… I asked him: 'Why are we going to the roof?' He reassured me, telling me that his studio is in another building on the same side of al-Maʿraḍ Street… and that it was easier to go there this way… His balcony looked onto the Parliament building."

(Nammar, 2001, pp. 14-15)

A while after Maryam started posing for Cesar, he asked her to quit all her other jobs and work for him exclusively. One day, when she was barely 16, as she posed for him when he was painting angels, Cesar asked Maryam to take off all her clothes. She asked him, "[Why?] Were saints nude at the time?" (Nammar, 2001, p. 18). He began to show her photos of nude women from famous painters and asked her to imitate them. To ease her hesitation he said, "Anyway, this matter will remain a secret between us, and no one will know about it" (Nammar, 2001, p. 18). Day after day, Maryam began posing in front of Cesar with only her underwear on.

Maryam remained Cesar's secret model for nearly seven years. She posed for long hours every day. Whenever he did not need her to pose for him, she worked at the house. Nobody knew about the agreement Maryam and Cesar had except his secret lover, who was a married woman. As such, when Maryam posed, all the windows were always closed. For long years, Cesar told curious visitors who marveled at the nude bodies he drew, that the woman in the paintings was purely the outcome of his own imagination. Whenever somebody happened to knock at the door while she was there, he rushed to hide her.

Although Cesar always intimidated Maryam with his bad temper, he was not indifferent to the charm of her body. Their relationship, however, remained strictly professional. She continued to model even though she was underpaid because, the more she contemplated her body as Cesar painted it, the more she grew fond of it, and the more she appreciated its potential to arouse others' feelings (Nammar, 2001).

FROM THE STUDIO TO THE ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS

In 1945, after Cesar persuaded her, Maryam accepted to pose in front of students at the Academy of Arts at the Lebanese University; her only condition was that her bathing suit remained on. She gained 150 Lebanese pounds along with what Cesar paid her at the studio.

The Academy was located in the *al-ʿĀzarīyya* building, in downtown Beirut. The duration of each session was three hours. The first time Maryam posed for students; she was wearing a Bedouin outfit, a blue vest decorated with golden strips over a long black robe, and she had her head covered with a colorful wrap. The second week, Maryam took off part of her clothes and sat with only her nightgown on, which was a blue top made of a shiny textile that exposed her curves just like when she was naked. Hence, some students chose to draw her naked. In the third week, Maryam wore a bathing suit. After those early sessions, Maryam gradually got accustomed to exposing her body to students; she was especially encouraged by their serious attitude, and it always remained a condition of hers that nobody enters the studio while she was posing nude, other than the art students. Maryam thus became the first woman in Lebanon to sit naked "under the gaze of artists and the strokes of their brushes" (Abi Samra, 2001, p. 6).

One day, a number of students including Nicolas Nammar,[4] Shafic Abboud,[5] Mounir Eido, Farid Aouad,[6] Yolland Saad, Helen Khal,[7], and Yvette Achkar[8] came forward and asked Maryam to pose for them outside class hours on weekends in return for money. As many of them contended, "Maryam's body was not perfect but radiated with harmony, purity, smoothness, and color transparency. It was an inspiring source in its gentle movements, delicate bends, and brightness" (Sultan, 1996, p. 10). A special relationship developed between this first generation of students at the Academy and Maryam. She expressed that "this group of students was my favorite. I loved them and they loved me. They persevered, worked with enthusiasm, and were always polite with me" (Nammar, 2001, p. 21). She added:

"This is what encouraged me to continue in my profession as a "nude model"; if, initially, I used to be intimidated to sit

naked in front of people, with them I felt as though the studio at the Academy had become my home and they had become my family. We often went out together, and we attended concerts organized by Alexis Boutros[9] in the city halls: from cinema Roxy,' to cinema 'Dunyā,' and to the West Hall of AUB. I was to them their model and their cheerful friend who was always willing to share their parties and keep their secrets… I liked them, and after considering myself the property of Qaysar al-Gemayl and his friend, I became the partner of a rising generation that had its ambitions and dreams."

(Nammar, 2001, p. 33)

Maryam was always generous with students, often posing after class hours for free so that they could take their time to finish the painting they had started. Due to the many hours spent in the Academy's studio, Maryam developed a taste in art and an ability to give sensible comments. She even felt compelled to make sharp comments about beginners' drawings or students' drawings that never improved.

MARYAM BREAKS WITH CESAR AND THE ACADEMY

On one occasion, Maryam complained to Cesar about her salary. In response, he told her that the administration refused to pay her more than 100 Lebanese Pounds and that he was paying her an additional 50 Lebanese Pounds from his own budget. When the Secretary General of the Academy, Aida Naufal, the woman whom Cesar was about to marry one day learned what Cesar told Maryam, she was outraged. She immediately went to Cesar and reprimanded him. Instead of rebuking Aida, however, he poured his rage on Maryam. After this incident, Maryam's salary was increased to two hundred Lebanese Pounds.

Though Cesar's reaction was no surprise to Maryam, it was more than she could take from him. Since the day he scolded her for having discussed her salary with Aida, going to the workshop became a burden to her. Nevertheless, she never lost her love for the job and stayed for a short while after that.

Maryam believed that Cesar noticed the change in her. He continued to mistreat her and did his best to prevent all her attempts to work for anyone else (Nammar, 2001). He kept pretending that he was doing this for her sake, telling her he wanted to protect her from abuse. Maryam tolerated these rough conditions until the day Georges Cyr[10] contacted her with a better offer and asked her to come and pose for painters in his studio twice a week, vowing to pay her twelve Lebanese Pounds in return. She agreed to take the job.

As expected, this decision was not welcomed by the administration of the Academy. Alexis Boutros, one of the co-founders of the Academy, sent after Maryam to warn her. He asked her, "Maryam? Do you know who you are working with? Georges Cyr is known as Abraham, and he is Jewish. He is one of the Academy's competitors" (Nammar, 2001, p. 25). He wanted to intimidate her, but he failed to change her mind. Meanwhile, Maryam proceeded with her job at the Academy until 1965, when she decided to accept Nicolas's proposal to become the official model of the Institute of Arts of the Lebanese University.

A SILENT DEATH

After this visit, Nadia Nammar paid several more to Maryam in her home, before, one day, she had to be hospitalized suddenly. She never made it back to her home. During the last days she spent at the hospital, she felt lonely and confined: "Nobody asks about me anymore, they have all forgotten about me, and have forgotten the favors I have done for them" (Nammar, 2001, p. 37). Although artists and friends of Maryam never forgot about her, the fact remains that she seems to have lost touch with them. Only one of them, Shafic Abboud, met her shortly before she passed away; she had passed by him when she traveled to Paris to undergo treatment. Shafic told Nadia:

"She entered the gallery where I was holding my exhibition, and I was surprised to see her enter like a royal queen, belonging to one of France's prestigious families, in her walk, her clothes, and even her sunglasses. Seeing her made me happy and took me back to a distant past, and to memories of my first steps in the world of art. Her situation pained me as she told me that she had come to Paris to get treatment for a dangerous disease and she had asked me to help her by contacting those concerned."

(Nammar, 2001, p. 65)

Maryam passed away in 1996 during the Grapes of Wrath carnage that took place in the south of Lebanon. Despite the key role she had played in launching plastic art in Lebanon, there was no one to pay her tribute when she departed eternally, and nobody ever mentioned what she died of.

"When Maryam lay or sat on the "Sofa" dedicated to her, the electric light that was directed on her revealed the charms of her body as if she was coming out of a painting… Or like a reproduction of an old Greek or Roman statue."

(Nammar, 2001, p. 66)

According to Halim Jurdak,[11] *"Maryam […] was a friend to everybody, giving and loving. We loved her and she reciprocated that love. To show her our love for her, we asked her for her opinion on some of the artwork we had done; she had picked up some phrases from Gemayel and some of her old students, some of whom later became our professors, such as "that is good" and she would be so happy to repeat them to us… During her years working with young artists, she gained artistic knowledge that so many art critics who wrote in local newspapers lacked. Using this knowledge, she could distinguish the professional and talented students."*

(Nammar, 2001, p. 87)

NOTES

1 Maurice Gemayel (1910-1970) was a former Member of Parliament and prominent figure in the Katāʾib Party.

2 Cesar Gemayel (1898-1958) was a Lebanese painter.

3 Habib Srour (1863–1938) was a Lebanese painter and professor of drawing.

4 Nicolas Nammar (1925-2011) was a Lebanese painter, cultural activist, and founding member of UL Institute of Fine Arts.

5 Shafic Abboud (1926-2004) was a Lebanese painter.

6 Farid Aouad (1924-1982) was a Lebanese artist.

7 Helen Khal (1923-2009) was a Lebanese-American artist and art critic.

8 Yvette Achkar (1928-2024) was a Lebanese-Brazilian painter.

9 Alexis Boutros (1915-1979) was a Lebanese musician and engineer.

10 Georges Cyr (1880-1964) was a French painter.

11 Halim Jurdak (1927-2020) was a Lebanese artist.

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SANIYYA HABBOUB AL-NAQQASH

(1901 – 1983)

Seeking self-empowerment as well as the service of others, Saniyya Habboub al-Naqqash excelled as one of the earliest medical doctors of her century. Despite all obstacles, she remained steadfast in her commitment to achieving her dreams.

FROM RELIGIOUS TO MISSIONARY SCHOOLS

Born in 1901, Saniyya Habboub al-Naqqash was the daughter of Moustafa Habboub, a well-off Sunni Beiruti merchant, and Adla al-Jazairy, an Algerian woman. At a time when it was not common for girls to go to school, Saniyya was one of the few Beiruti girls whose parents enrolled them to study the *Qurʾān*. She was a little girl when she started going to the school of *al-Shaykh* Omar in Beirut.

According to Nasrallah (2001), shortly after she finished her primary education, she was invited by one of her friends, Suhayla Saadeh, to go to the modern school established by the Scottish missionaries. One visit was enough to get Saniyya to join the school. A few years later, she moved to the American School for Girls (ASG), from which she graduated upon completing her secondary studies.

Shortly after the outbreak of World War One, Saniyya stopped going to school and got married at a young age; it was a traditionally arranged marriage that did not last long. The divorce was an impetus for Saniyya to start a different kind of life, where she could show the world that a woman could study, work, and take care of her home and family. After the divorce, her parents fulfilled her wish to pursue her studies (Khairallah, 1996).

As soon as the First World War ended, Saniyya joined the Beirut College for Women (BCW), which is currently the Lebanese American University (LAU), to study medicine. She had only two classmates: Mounira al-Barbir and Arminohi Mugriditchian, who were also studying medicine. Their presence at the college was accepted by colleagues and teachers. Saniyya, however, had to endure pressure and harassment from people in her

society who deemed it inappropriate for a girl to attend college.

From the Junior College, Saniyya went on, still wearing the veil, to continue her studies at the American University of Beirut (AUB). Even there, she witnessed the bitter fight between two factions at the university, one that wanted to admit women as students and the other that strongly opposed it (Stephan, 1983, p. 5). Finally, Saniyya and her friends graduated from the college in 1925 when she was 27 years old *(*Al-Raida, *1982).*

After graduation, Saniyya was determined to continue her higher education and become a doctor. Hence, she decided to leave for the United States (U.S.) despite receiving threatening letters. She sold her diamond earrings to pay for the trip. At the last moment, her father tried to use his authority to stop her from going. Composedly, she reminded him that she was an adult, so he stepped aside and gave her his blessings with one last advice: "Do what you would not be ashamed of in front of God and his people" (*Ṣawt al-Marʾa,* 1958, p. 12).

THE JOURNEY TO BECOMING A MEDICAL DOCTOR

Although at first, her journey was far from merry, it later became crowned with success all the way through. Shortly after she settled down, she became involved in social activities and made pocket money from lectures and talks she gave about women's issues. Saniyya completed her preliminary studies in medicine at Western College, Cincinnati, and then moved to Pennsylvania University where she specialized in gynecology and graduated in 1931.

Saniyya's performance as a student was so outstanding that she received several financial packages and scholarships and on her graduation day, the university paid her tribute by inviting the Lebanese historian Philip Hitti[1] to speak at the commencement (Khairallah, 1996). In gratitude, "Saniyya endowed the university with a scholarship in her name, equivalent to the amount she had earned from a series of lectures in the United States that she had given to support herself" (Khairallah, 1996, p. 255).

AN EXCEPTIONALLY PRODUCTIVE LIFE

In 1932, Saniyya returned to Lebanon and started practicing her profession. She opened a clinic in downtown Beirut, in the Bab Idris area. According to Khairallah (1996), "her first patient arrived even before the windows were curtained. The woman simply draped her *ʿabāya* cloak on the window and Saniyya proceeded to examine her" (p. 255).

For a while, Saniyya had to stand up to stern public opinion that was not willing to give women, namely, Muslim women, the right to practice medicine (*Ṣawt al-Marʾa*, 1958). In the beginning, men had difficulty trusting her ability to be a good doctor; some even spread rumors that she was no more than a midwife. In the end, and through hard work and positive outcomes, she earned people's acceptance and recognition. More importantly, Saniyya was a very charitable doctor:

"One day as one of her patients was leaving, she gave her a handful of pennies and 'change.' So, she asked her, 'Does your husband work in the tramway?' The lady answered her, 'No, this is what I could collect from my children's allowance.' Saniyya was so touched that she returned the lady her amount with more money as well and gave her the medication for free."

(*Al-Anwār*, 1982, p. 16)

It was not long after her efforts in practicing her profession met with success that Saniyya got married again, to the journalist Muhammad al-Naqqash, who was younger than she. Shortly after he interviewed her for an article he was writing in 1937, their admiration and fondness for each other started to grow, ending in marriage *(Ṣawt al-Marʾa, 1958).* Hand in hand with her husband, Saniyya brought up their two daughters and maintained a fulfilling life, successfully playing the roles of doctor, wife, and mother. She practiced her profession for 45 years, nearly half a century (Nuwayhid, 1986).

Despite her preoccupation with her clinic and her family, Sanniya worked with the Lebanese Red Cross and served as a board member for the Muslim orphanage, the Maqāṣid Hospital, among other organizations (Al-Raida, 1982). She was also named honorary President of the *Nādī al-Shābbāt al-Muslimāt*.

TRIBUTES AND HONORS

Due to weakened health, Saniyya was not able to attend the ceremony held by the School of Medicine of the University of Pennsylvania in 1982 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of her graduation from the institution. Still, she was lucky to witness the extent of appreciation and esteem her own country held for her. The three Presidents of the Lebanese Republic Alfred al-Naqqache,[2] Bechara al-Khoury,[3] and Suleiman Frangieh[4] had respectively awarded her the Lebanese Silver Medal for Merit, the Golden Order of Merit, and the National Order of Cedars (Grade Knight). In addition, the French Association awarded her the Medal of Social Services.

Saniyya passed away in 1983 (Nuwayhid, 1986), after having dedicated almost 50 years to medical service. In honor of her accomplishments, the Municipality of Beirut named a street in the

Ramlet al-Baida area after her. With her death Lebanon and the Arab World lost a legendary figure who "shall always remain a leader to the women of her nationality and among the first pioneers who worked toward liberating women and ensuring their financial independence" *(Ṣawt al-Marʾa, 1958, p. 13)*. As Nuwayhid (1986) concludes, the life of Saniyya, one of the most dignified legendary figures in the history of Lebanon, shall always remain an ever-shining successful model for women to follow.

Saniya was quite young when she started to realize that if a woman was financially dependent on her father and husband – as it was the case with most women at the time – she is forced into some kind of servitude, and lives at the mercy of her male kin.

(Tabsh, 1953)

Sanniya endured criticisms, insults, and threats that were thrown at her as she commuted between home, college, and AUB where she went to take courses for her degree, which her college did not offer. Equipped with a strong will, faith, and ambition, she withstood it all.

(*Ṣawt al-Marʾa*, 1958)

"By the time that Saniyya was ready for higher education, the American University of Beirut had dropped the outdated regulations which barred Anas Baz[5] from studying at the Syrian Protestant College, [currently AUB]. But social disapprobation proved as difficult for Saniyya to overcome as regulation had for Anas, and, like Anas, she had to seek education abroad."

(Khairallah, 1996, p. 254)

NOTES

1 Philip Hitti (1886–1978) was a Lebanese-American professor, scholar, and president of al-ʾAhliyya School's Committee of Supporters and Friends in New York.

2 Afred Naqqache (1888-1878) was Prime Minister of Lebanon and then President under the French Mandate.

3 Bechara al-Khoury (1890-1964) was the first President of Lebanon, serving from 1943 to 1952.

4 Suleiman Frangieh (1910-1992) was President of Lebanon from 1970 to 1976.

5 Anas Barakat Baz (1874-1929) was one of the earliest Lebanese women gynecologists.

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